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THE BUCKSKIN BOWERS



"OH LIZETTE, WE ARE SAVED, FOR THEY ARE THOSE TWO NOBLE MEN,
THE POWELL BROTHERS!"

OR, The Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande.

A Story of Texan Adventure and Romance.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "NEVADA NED," "WIZARD WILL,"
"BISON BILL," "DIAMOND DIRK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

THOUGH the locale of my story is in Texas, a land so full of romance, the first scene opens in New York.

Over the door of a down-town structure hangs a sign upon which is printed in large gilt letters:

"LAW OFFICES."

At the end of a long hallway within the build-

ing, is a door upon which was the following lettering:

"KENNARD KEMP,
"Attorney-at-Law."

Within the office, which was comfortably furnished, a young man was seated, looking over some papers.

He was fashionably dressed, his face close shaven and handsome, and his air was that of one who had been reared in refinement.

He belonged to a fashionable club, though his means of existence no one seemed exactly to understand, for as he passed most of his time in enjoyment, his practice as a lawyer could not be very lucrative.

Still he was an attractive fellow, spent his money freely, and, though nothing was known of his antecedents, he was accepted in society as a gentleman.

A knock at the door caused him to start.

One would judge that he was not accustomed to calls from the manner in which that knock disturbed him.

Hastily putting down the papers, and dropping his hand in his pocket, as if from design, he arose and went to the door.

Contrary to general custom among lawyers, he kept his outer door locked—it was said, to keep out tramps and peddlers; but there was a slide in the door, too, a small panel through which he could see his visitor before admitting him.

Sliding back the panel he beheld a tall man, heavily bearded and wearing a slouch hat and cloak, though the weather was by no means cold.

"I wish to see Lawyer Kemp," said a deep voice.

"Your business with him?"

"A matter of importance to him, as well as to myself."

"Come in."

The door opened, and the man entered.

"Be seated, sir," and the lawyer pointed to a chair, while he again locked the door and continued to keep his right hand in the pocket of his sack coat.

"You are Lawyer Kemp?" said the visitor, taking a different seat from the one assigned him.

"I am; but, pardon me if I ask you to take that other chair, sir, as the light shines in my eyes and blinds me, as you now sit."

The visitor obeyed, and the change put him full in the light, Mr. Kemp in the shadow.

"Your business, please?"

He gazed at the stranger as he asked the question, and beheld a roughly-dressed man, with blonde beard and light hair, the latter worn long, and wearing a slouch hat, which he had not removed.

The stranger appeared to be about thirty-five, and he had the appearance of one, to look at him closely, who was trying to disguise himself.

"Well, sir, my business is your business, for there is money in it for both of us."

"Ah!"

"I have a little scheme in which there is big money, if it is properly handled."

"Well, sir, explain."

"Perhaps the work might be a little off color."

"Most money-making schemes of to-day are that, sir."

"You are right, there, Mr. Kemp, for those who cry down gambling and sporting the loudest, are some of these very pious stock speculators, and stock speculation is but gambling on a large scale," and the man seemed to suddenly drop an assumed manner and appear himself, and Kennard Kemp did not fail to notice it.

"It is a gambling scheme, then, you refer to?"

"Oh, no, and yet, in one way it is, for it's a chance to get money."

"I am listening, sir."

"You can be trusted, I suppose?"

"To any extent."

"Suppose it is a case of trickery?"

"I have all kinds of cases, sir, to attend to."

"It might be a little worse."

"How so?"

"A life and death case."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir; but, there is big money in it."

"Who sent you to me?"

"I saw an advertisement in the paper which said 'Shady Cases Undertaken,' and the address was 'Number One Hundred, Herald Office.'"

"I wrote, and the note in answer said—'Apply Kennard Kemp,' and gave this address."

"I see; and yours is a *shady* case?"

"Decidedly."

"Well, I am ready to hear it."

"Be the work what it may?"

"Yes."

"Enough! I will confide in you, and if you betray me, I will kill you, if I hang for it," and the visitor evidently meant what he said, as he glanced into the face of the lawyer, who started at this sudden utterance of his strange client.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET COMPACT.

"I DO not fear threats, sir; but I will undertake your work, if there is anything in it, so pray let me know about it at once, though first I would know the name of my client."

"By a strange coincidence, sir, our initials are the same, 'K. K.,' my name being Keene Kendall."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir; and I am rich in *aliases* when they are needed."

"Doubtless; but to the business in hand, Mr. Keene Kendall."

"There is a woman in the case, sir."

"How could it be otherwise?" asked the lawyer, with a sneer.

"To state the case, it is just this:

"A gentleman by birth and breeding was 'on his uppers,' so to speak, when a lucky card he was betting on—his last five dollars by the way—panned out a snug sum, and fortune so smiled on him then, for an entire evening, that he left the table a winner of several thousands."

"He was wise, for he rented pleasant rooms, paid for them in advance, and fitted himself up, and was received in society."

"One day, while driving with a lady and her parents in the Park—a lady who had a cool quarter of a million in her own right, and whom he expected to marry—a runaway team came dashing along."

"He had been raised among horses, was an athlete, having been, in fact, in a circus for a year or more at one time, and he saw his opportunity to gain more favor in papa's eyes than he then had; so he sprung from the carriage, watched well, seized the reins of the runaways, threw himself upon the back of one, and checked them, amid a burst of wild applause from lookers-on."

"The carriage contained two persons, an old gentleman and a most beautiful young girl, his daughter, the coachman having been thrown from his box."

"They were profuse in their thanks, of course, and though not at all hurt, the rescuer pretended that his arm was injured, for greater effect."

"Well, the upshot of it was that the rescued lady was an only child, and her father trebly a millionaire, it was said."

"They were not from New York, but lived in another city, and there the rescuer of the maiden went."

"He had won papa, the maiden liked him, and as he was considered wealthy the old man was anxious for his daughter to marry him, though she was already engaged to a poor young army officer."

"The old man had made his will, it was understood, leaving everything to his daughter, and soon after the runaway incident, some five months, the adventurer and the heiress were married."

"Then her father died suddenly, from heart disease it was decided, and it came out that he was not worth a dollar."

"Of course this did not suit the adventurer, and he began to abuse his wife, for he wanted to get a divorce so that he could yet catch an heiress that had *real* money."

"His wife left him on account of abuse, and, possessed of an exquisite voice, went on the operatic stage, where she now is, with another name."

"He happened to get a letter one day, by mistake, addressed to her dead father; this he opened and read, as the dead man could not do it."

"Of course," said the lawyer with a smile.

"It was a letter from an old friend of the dead man, one who, it seems, had left home under a cloud, and to whom the man he addressed had loaned quite a snug sum of money, for which he had nothing to show."

"Now this party had gone to New Mexico, and had put the money he had into mining, he wrote, and the result was that he had amassed a large fortune."

"This he considered his dead friend half partner in, and, a bachelor, he had already made his will, leaving his wealth to the daughter of the man who had befriended him."

"Did he name any sum in this letter?" asked the lawyer, with considerable interest.

"Yes, he spoke of the sum loaned him as ten

thousand dollars, and said that it had multiplied a hundred times for the lender, while his own fortune would be as great."

"This would make a million for each of them."

"Yes."

"A handsome fortune, indeed, Mr. Kendall."

"Yes, Mr. Kemp, a very handsome fortune, and worth a struggle for."

"And the letter?"

"Ah, yes! the party was in hiding, under an assumed name, and was not in as good health as he could wish."

"Whatever his crime was, it preyed upon his mind, and so he had written his friend, as he said, to add another million to his millions, for the service he had done him in the past, and also to make his daughter his heiress."

"This daughter was the one who married the adventurer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, your plan?"

"For you to draw up some papers, making the adventurer the executor of his wife's estate, and keep them in your hands. Then you are to get acquainted with the wife, by playing a little game, such as paying to her a few hundred dollars left in your hands by her father, and, as a lawyer, you might call yourself her attorney, and what more natural, in case of her demise from some cause, than that you should have her papers?"

"Of course you are to then advertise for her husband; he will answer, and the whole affair will work well."

"But the woman may not die!"

"Leave *that* to me!" was the cool response.

"And the miner in New Mexico?"

"There is where your handiwork must be seen again, for you will have to take a trip out to the property, on *other* business, you know, accidentally meet the miner, who has executed no legal papers as to giving half his share to his dead friend, or leaving his fortune to his daughter."

"His letter stated that he would do so, as soon as he had a response, and could go where there was a lawyer to draw up the papers."

"Now, you can even carry a letter of introduction to the miner from his old friend."

"From a dead man?"

"Of course; nothing easier, for I will see to that."

"I understand; but then?"

"Why, after the papers are executed, you must see that the old man's suspicion about his health is right—he *must not live long*!"

"Would you murder him?"

"Oh, no; pay some one else to do that kind of work."

"Mr. Keene Kendall, you are a most thorough villain," remarked the lawyer.

"I know it, and I came to you to help me out, as we were both of the same mind regarding each other," was the candid response.

The face of the lawyer flushed, but the other said:

"Now, don't get mad, but help the adventurer to get this fortune, for just think, there are a couple of millions in it, perhaps more."

"And my share?"

"Pay expenses to be incurred, give me a thousand to live on, and we will call it one-fourth for you."

"Equal shares, or nothing."

"Agreed."

"And this adventurer?"

"I am the man!"

"You! You marry this beautiful woman you speak of?"

"Oh, yes, for I am under false colors now; but I'm a different-looking person when I am playing gentleman."

"But, is it a bargain?"

"Yes."

"And you will draw up the papers at once?"

"Is there immediate need?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"The lady starts South on a singing tour, and she goes as far as San Antonio, Texas, so I heard, and *that is a dangerous country to travel in, you know*."

"Ah, yes; I will attend to it at once."

"And when the papers are ready, and you have made the acquaintance of the lady, you will go to New Mexico to see the old miner?"

"Yes."

"I will give you the address of a gentleman there, who is an excellent undertaker."

"What do I want an undertaker for?"

"To undertake the work you won't undertake—*killing*."

"Ah, yes."

"Now, I will place the miner's letter and all the facts I have in your hands."

"One minute, please."

"Well, Mr. Kemp?"

"Has your wife any children, to inherit her property?"

"None; so I'll have full claim."

"All right, sir; you may consider the thing as settled," and the lawyer and the adventurer shook hands, to more fully bind the infamous compact entered into between them.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNHEEDED WARNING.

A WOMAN paced the floor of a handsome room in a San Antonio hotel.

It was near midnight, and she had just returned from the theater, where she had held men and women enthralled with her beauty and her exquisite voice, for the woman was an actress.

Her form was perfection, her face a rarely lovely one; but there was no flush of triumph upon it now, for it was pale, and her thoughts seemed far away as she walked the room with nervous tread.

Suddenly the door opened and a young girl, evidently a servant, entered, accompanied by a stout, pleasant-faced man, the landlord of the hotel.

"Ah, Mr. Hall, I am glad you have come. You made the inquiries for me I asked of you?" she said, in a rich, musical voice, as she advanced toward the landlord.

"Yes, miss, I can secure for you a light ambulance, with a good pair of horses, speedy if you have to run for it from the Comanches, and a complete outfit, with a guide who knows the ranch you spoke of."

"I thank you; and you engaged them, and the provisions and things we should need, I hope, Mr. Hall?"

"Yes, miss."

"How many men, did you say?"

"A guide and two men."

"And saddle-horses for Lizette and myself to break the monotony of ambulance riding?"

"Yes, miss; but I do wish to urge you not to go."

"When can I start, sir?" she asked, paying no heed to his somewhat earnest request for her not to go.

"At any time, for all are ready for you, miss; but let me say to you that I had a talk with Otis, the guide, and he says that it is a most perilous undertaking on your part, though of course he is willing to earn his money and go with you."

"He is reliable?"

"In every way."

"And the other two?"

"I have seen them about, now and then, and know them to be cowboys, but I guess they can be trusted."

"I will go, Mr. Hall."

"Against my warning that you risk your life, miss?"

"Yes, I shall in this case unheed your warning, and—"

"But, miss, I—"

"I have decided, Mr. Hall, and I would like to start at sunrise in the morning; so kindly have an early breakfast for us, and I will leave in your hands the money to pay the guide and his men upon their return."

"I was going to say, miss, that, not only will you have the Comanches to dread, but also the band of outlaws known as the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande."

"Bandits, I suppose?" was the calm query.

"About that; but, we call them Raiders, for they dash across from Mexico and give our people a great deal of trouble, so it would be better if you did not go."

"I will go, all the same, Mr. Hall."

The landlord said no more, bowed and retired, and the lady said:

"Lizette, ask my manager to come here to see me, please."

The French maid left the room, and still pacing the apartment, the beautiful actress mused aloud:

"To come here and not go to his grave, oh no! It would be cowardly, because there are dangers to beset my path. Poor, poor Henry! He loved me devotedly well I know, and yet my love for him was deeper. He deemed me false because I became the wife of Keene Kendall."

"He little knew that it was because I was entreated, almost forced, to marry him by my dying father."

"And the result?"

"Bah! I hate to think of it."

"And Henry is dead—was slain by Indians—"

so that letter from his faithful negro servant and friend said, when he returned me my letters and the locket containing my miniature, as his master asked him to do.

"I must see that negro, Zekiel Tanner—Scraps, I remember Henry was won't to call him when telling me of the faithful fellow. I must see the grave of the only man I ever loved, or can ever love."

"It was for this that I asked my manager to play at this place. He urged against it, and yet my success has been wonderful—ah, he is here."

But a hotel servant entered, bearing an exquisite cage, in which was a beautiful Mexican songbird.

"A present for you, miss, I reckon."

"For me?"

"Yes, miss, and these birds are most valuable and scarce. Here is the pasteboard—a card, I means, miss."

She took the card and read:

"FOR MADMOISELLE CLEOPATRA:—"

"As a slight return for the pleasure her singing has given—"

"GEORGE AND WILL POWELL,"

"Texas Scouts."

"Why those are the two striking looking persons I saw from the piazza this afternoon, as they rode by on horseback, and admired their superb horsemanship. 'Their name was Powell, the chambermaid said, and I saw them at the theater to-night. I can but accept their present, for it is just what I wished, this beautiful songstress of Mexico.'"

"Yes, miss, and Mr. Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell are the greatest scouts on this border. They are called the Buckskin Bowers, for they allus plays bowers when the game is ag'in' them; an' they is jist holy terrors on the shoot."

"Night Hawk George and Broncho Bill you called them?"

"Yes, miss, Mr. George, who hunted down alone a band of outlaws they called Night Hawks, and the Rangers gave him that name; his brother Will is the best rider and broncho-breaker on the prairies and they calls him Broncho Bill."

The actress smiled at the boy's earnest admiration for his border heroes, and seating herself at a table hastily wrote a note of thanks for the present, little dreaming that the kid had been sent to her for a special purpose, other than their real admiration, by the two scouts.

As the boy departed with her response, she turned to admire the cage and its occupant, and while she was so engaged, Lizette and her manager entered.

"Mr. Ogden, you are all ready to depart to-night with the company?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Cleopatra."

"Well, I wished to say to you, Mr. Ogden, that I shall remain here several days, and you can cancel the engagements for the coming week."

"But, mademoiselle, I—"

"It is my wish, Mr. Ogden, and all salaries will be paid in full, while the people can have a week's rest in Galveston, until I return. All expenses you can also charge to my account, so I alone am the loser," and the actress smiled sweetly, while the manager, delighted at an idle week and full pay, responded:

"Your will is law, Mademoiselle Cleopatra."

"Good-night, Mr. Ogden, and my regards to the company."

The manager bowed and departed, wondering at this strange freak of the beautiful star, while he muttered, looking at it from a pecuniary standpoint:

"It will cost her a cool thousand, and not a dollar coming in for the week. What is up, I wonder? The train leaves in a quarter of an hour, so I have not time to find out."

In the mean time mademoiselle and Lizette were making their preparations for an early start the next morning, which being completed, they sought a few hours' rest, for they well knew that a journey across the prairies was no easy undertaking.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE scene changes, and the wild prairies of the Lone Star State are now the theater of action for the characters of my story, which is built upon actual facts, of deeds done by the daring men who are its real heroes—the Powell brothers—and who now look back upon the strange and thrilling romance of their early lives as a dream.

In these days of matter-of-fact, it is hard to realize the romance and wild adventures upon

the frontier of Texas only a few years ago, and yet how many there are now alive who remember—for they can never forget!—the scenes on that "dark and bloody ground"—the Rio Grande frontier!

Over the prairie, at early dawn, an ambulance was making its way, the horses wearing a jaded look, as though they had been kept at a good pace through the night.

It was a lightly-built vehicle, and yet strong, and the driver was a dark-faced, bearded man of forty, with a black sombrero drawn down over his eyes, and wearing a belt bristling with weapons.

There were two other occupants of the ambulance, one being none other than Mademoiselle Cleopatra, the actress, and the other Lizette, her maid.

Both were dressed in cloth traveling-suits, while riding-skirts and heavy coats and shawls were thrown across the back seat of the vehicle.

The face of the actress was sad, and yet she looked very beautiful in spite of having been twenty-four hours upon the trail.

Behind the ambulance, and fastened to it, trotted three horses, two with side-saddles upon them, and the third with a man's saddle, evidently the animal belonging to the driver of the vehicle.

Behind these was a horseman, with a face no more prepossessing than was that of the driver, and equally as fiercely armed.

Before them a short distance, loomed up some timber-land, and out of it suddenly came a horseman, and across the prairie came the cry:

"Good camp here!"

The horses pricked up their ears and improved their pace and soon the party drove into the timber, where the horseman who had hailed them, was waiting, having dismounted and built a fire.

He was a young man, dressed in buckskin, and wore a knife and pair of revolvers in his belt, while his rifle hung at his saddle-born.

It was Otis, the guide of the little expedition, and fast as had been the travel, since leaving the town, he had gone on ahead before daylight, to seek a camping-place for rest and breakfast.

The ambulance was halted in the timber, the horses staked out and the actress and her maid were quickly gathering wild flowers, while the guide prepared breakfast, and the two others looked to the care of the animals.

"Ma'm'selle, I do not like those two men," said Lizette, addressing the actress and motioning to the two rough-looking men who were standing apart now and conversing together in a low tone.

"Nor do I, Lizette, and I have watched them closely and thought their actions suspicious. Whenever we have halted they have whispered together, but it may be their way," replied the actress.

Strolling up toward the fire, she said, addressing the guide, who was certainly preparing a very tempting breakfast:

"Guide, why is it we pushed ahead so very rapidly, for there seemed to be no need of it, though I did not care to delay on the trip?"

"I feared we were driving you too hard, miss, and I told the boys so; but they said they were anxious to get ahead, before some Comanches they heard was on the trail, got down to head us off, and so I kept going."

"You know these two men well, do you not, Guide Otis?"

"Well, I know they are prairie-men, and I've seen 'em often. If I'd had more time to look about, miss, I'd have gotten some of my own pards for the trip."

"I only wish that you had," was the reply, and then Mademoiselle Cleopatra and Lizette sat down to breakfast, and they enjoyed it too.

The others also came up and ate with the relish of hungry men, one of them remarking:

"You better git a leetle sleep fer a couple o' hours, miss, you and yer friend, fer we will halt here awhile."

"Is this your decision, guide?" asked the actress, quietly turning to Otis.

"No, miss, for there is more danger here than there was further back, so I should say push on now to the ranch, for it is not so very far off, and there are some other ranches near it which will be a protection, while here there is nothing but wild lands."

"Then we will continue on, for you are captain," was the reply.

"The horses hes got ter hev some rest arter pushing them so," growled the other man.

"You should not have pushed them so hard then, for there was no need of it," and the woman bent her bright, fearless eyes upon the two

men, who soon after got up and said they would make a circuit of the timber and be ready to start when they returned.

In the mean time, the guide told Mademoiselle Cleopatra that it would be fully an hour before they could start, as the horses needed a rest, because they would have to push right on from there without stop, and she had better get what sleep she could.

Very tired, and needing sleep, both mademoiselle and Lizette were only too willing for a short rest, and the guide having spread their blankets and shawls for them, they lay down and were very soon in a deep slumber.

How long they slept they did not know, but a shot caused them to start up, and glancing about in alarm, the guide and the two men were nowhere to be seen!

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S PLUCK.

WHEN the actress and her maid had sought rest, the guide also decided to do the same, for he had already taken a glance about and saw that there were no enemies in sight.

Then the two men, in whom he had confidence, had gone off for a little search in the woods, and they would know and give warning, was there danger about.

Guide Otis had not been very long asleep, when one of the men crept up to him and awakened him.

He motioned for silence, as he glanced toward where the other sleepers were, and beckoned to him to follow, which the guide did, and when they had gotten out of hearing of the actress, should she be awake, the man said:

"Jack has struck some signs over here he don't half like, pard."

"Where?"

"Over yonder in the timber."

"What kind of signs?"

"He thinks Injuns, and told me ter come arter you."

The guide followed rapidly, while he said:

"I don't like halting in this country, Bob, no longer than we need to."

"The truth is we could have come slow up to this point without much danger, and then pushed ahead rapidly from here to the Ranchero's Rest Rancho."

"Waal, I guesses we'll git through all right, but, what on airth are the gal goin' out thar fer?"

"She wants to see the ranchero, I guess on some business that I don't know anything about, nor do I care, so I get her there and back in safety."

The man made no reply, and they soon came upon Jack, who was standing by a large tree, looking intently down upon the ground.

"What is it, Jack?" called out the guide.

"I dunno, see ef you kin tell," was the answer.

The guide bent over to gaze upon what appeared to be a trail on the ground, and without warning the man named Jack struck him a heavy blow upon the back of the head, while he called out:

"Now knife him, Bob!"

But the guide was not dead, though staggered and knocked down.

He had been taken unawares, but tried to get his revolver out, as he staggered to his feet, bleeding and half blind from the blow.

"Knife him!" yelled Jack, while Bob, not caring to risk a shot, hastily fired, as the brave fellow was trying to raise his own weapon to do so.

Without a groan Otis the guide sunk in his tracks, and Bob said hastily:

"I had ter do it, pard, fer yer know he ar' a bad hand with a revolver. Yer didn't hit him hard enough."

"Go back and tell ther wimmin, ef they heard ther shot, that I has gone out ter shoot a deer, and ther guide hev rid on ahead; then I'll come and say as how I missed the deer, and Otis asked us ter foller on soon, and we'll git started, fer it's about time we should meet ther boys comin' this way."

"Yas, and I hope we will, fer I wants ter git ther wimmin off my hands and handle my dust fer ther work we has did."

Bob then hastily returned to the camp, while his comrade very coolly robbed the body of the dead guide of what things he had about him.

Upon approaching the camp Bob saw that the actress and Lizette were up and alarmed by the shot.

"Ah, sir, what is it?" cried Mademoiselle Cleopatra.

"What are what, ledly?"

"That shot."

"Oh! that were my pard arter a deer."

"And the guide?"

"He hev gone on, and said as how we was ter foller."

"Why, there is his horse!"

Bob was too thorough a villain even to be taken aback at this proof that he was lying, and he said with the utmost coolness:

"Yas, he said he'd let his critter rest all he could, while he went on afoot. He wanted to be over yonder rise in ther pararee, so as ter make sart'in ther way were clear."

The other villain now approached, and preparations for a start were at once made.

Mademoiselle did not half like the guide's leaving, and she saw that the two men exchanged glances when Jack came to camp.

They kept close together, and now and then spoke in low tones.

At last all was in readiness, and Mademoiselle Cleopatra said pleasantly:

"As there is the guide's horse also to lead, let me drive, please, until we overtake him."

The men saw no harm in this, for she had often driven the day before, and handled the reins splendidly, all three of the men had remarked.

As they started—the two men now ahead, leading the way with the led horses—the actress said:

"Lizette, I saw that man Jack place something in the ambulance under the seat. It was a large bundle, and he tried to hide it. Pretend that you intend to take a nap and see what it is."

Lizette stretched herself out on the back seat of the ambulance, and reaching down soon had unwrapped the bundle.

"Ma'm'selle!" she said, excitedly.

"Yes, Lizette."

"It is the guide's coat, hat and belt of arms." The actress turned very pale. She felt now that there was no doubt of the treachery of the men, and yet what to do she hardly knew.

"Lizette!"

"Yes, ma'm'selle."

"Are you afraid to shoot a revolver?"

"No, ma'm'selle."

"Well, get the guide's revolvers ready, and I will let those two traitors get some distance ahead; then we'll turn and go back."

"If they pursue, try and kill them; but these horses are fast, and I do not believe they can catch us, and we have day before us to follow the trail, we came back to the little cabin we passed last night."

"You are very brave, ma'm'selle, for we are in great danger."

"Yes, Lizette, and we have only ourselves to help us out of it, so you must do all you can."

"I will, ma'm'selle," and a determined look passed over the pretty face for the French maid.

Not for a moment dreaming that they were suspected, the two men rode on, leading the three horses behind them.

They got some distance ahead, and ascending the rise of the prairie, looked over the country and beheld a party of horsemen approaching.

Jack said, eagerly:

"It's ther Cowboy Pirates, so now our work is done."

"Yes, but let us ride on toward 'em, as ther wimmin, seein' us halt, might git scared."

So on they rode, disappearing over the rise.

Instantly did the ambulance turn and start back, Mademoiselle Cleopatra urging the horses into a brisk gait.

The villains looked back as they drew nearer the party of horsemen, and not seeing the ambulance come over the rise, halted.

Then, as it did not appear, they looked at each other and started back.

Reaching the top of the rise, they uttered yells of rage as they saw the vehicle an eighth of a mile away, going with full speed upon the back trail!

Shouting to the party of horsemen to come on, they started in pursuit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BUCKSKIN BOWERS.

THE beautiful woman, who had risked life and paid out a large sum to visit the grave upon the prairie—the grave of the man who had devotedly loved her, and whom she had loved, though she wedded another—realized fully her danger.

She had determined upon flight, and yet she hardly hoped to escape from the men on horseback.

Still, she had noticed that the ambulance horses were splendid animals, and much less jaded by the hard trip they had had than were

the inferior animals ridden by the two traitors.

"If you can only frighten those two wretches off by firing at them, Lizette, I believe we can escape," Mademoiselle Cleopatra had said.

She had not seen over the rise, that there were other horsemen near at hand, or she would have considered her case a hopeless one.

So on she sped, the horses running without the urging of the whip, while Lizette, in the rear of the swaying ambulance, stood ready to do her part by firing upon the pursuers.

Suddenly a cry came from Lizette.

It was one of startling earnestness.

"What is it, Lizette?" cried the actress, without even glancing around.

"Oh, m'am'selle, there are more horsemen coming over the hill."

"Then they will be our friends."

"No, m'am'selle, for the two rascals are waving to them to come on."

"God have mercy," came in low tones from the lips of the beautiful woman, and seizing the whip, she laid it upon the horses.

They bounded forward at a greater speed; but a look showed that they were not gaining upon their pursuers.

Suddenly the fair driver uttered a cry, and half drew rein, then swerved from her direct course.

"See there, Lizette!" she cried.

The girl turned and beheld two horsemen dashing from the timber.

At the first glance Mademoiselle Cleopatra had considered them foes; but quickly she changed her mind, for she seemed to recognize them, as the actress said with a voice quivering with excitement:

"Oh, Lizette, we are saved, for they are those two noble men, the Powell Brothers."

"But, m'am'selle, they are but two, and they dare not face so many," urged Lizette.

"Too true," came in low a tone in response.

But, on came the two horsemen, who had dashed out of the timber; and splendid specimens of manhood they were—men who would dare any danger—deadly shots, perfect horsemen, and caring for no odds, so that they could befriend those in distress.

They were superbly mounted, their saddles and bridles were of Mexican make and bespangled with silver pesos.

They were dressed in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirts, wore cavalry top-boots, and broad sombreros embroidered in silver, and their arms were of the best manufacture.

Their faces were strangely alike, with features cut in a bold, fearless, and intelligent mold, and their hair, as jet-black as the raven's wing, was worn long and flowing, floating back upon the wind as they came along at full speed.

Their rifles were held in hand, ready for use, and in spite of the fact that their foes were three to one against them, they did not hesitate, for they were on the trail of that ambulance, and had been for twenty-four hours.

They knew whom it contained, and they knew that the men in chase were the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande.

Upon the frontier the two men were known far and wide. Evil-doers feared them and shunned them, for they were scouts at the fort, and woe be unto the outlaw whose trail the Buckskin Brothers, as men called them, started upon, for they never left it until the end was found.

"Drive on to the timber, lady! we will take care of those fellows!" came in the ringing voice of Night Hawk Powell as they swept by the ambulance.

A moment after the beautiful actress saw the Buckskin Brothers raise their rifles, the two weapons flashed together, and from their saddles dropped the two leading Cowboy Pirates.

Instantly a cry of alarm came from one of the group of Cowboy Pirates further back:

"About, pards, for them two is ther Powell Bowers, an' we'll be euchered sure if we don't play sharp! Where they is, so is their red-skin and nigger pards, so we've got our hands full this time, lead sure."

CHAPTER VII.

NIGHT HAWK'S SECRET.

A CAMP upon the prairie, and about it those who seem out of place on that wild frontier of Texas.

There are six persons, and four of them were in the scene of the thrilling race of the ambulance before the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande, for they are the actress and Lizette, and the Brothers in Buckskin. The other two are an Indian and a negro.

The Indian is one of the Comanche tribe, dressed as a chief, and he stands apart, upright as a statue, and apparently on sentinel duty.

The negro is dressed in a costume that is decidedly unique, for it partakes of the red-skin garb and the attire of a borderman.

He wears top-boots, leggings and hunting-shirt, beaded and ornamented with porcupine-quills dyed many colors, a necklace of bear-claws, and a sombrero in which are pinned, with a silver star, some gorgeous feathers.

The two brothers are busy in preparing brush shelter for the actress and Lizette, and the latter is overhauling the ambulance after its rough run.

The horses are staked out upon the prairie near the clump of timber, and the actress is seated upon a fallen tree, while the negro stands near, talking to her.

The face of the woman is pale and sad, and she has not fully recovered from the exciting chase of the day before upon the prairie.

The Cowboy Pirates, knowing well the daring men who had come to her rescue, had put back in flight before them, and while Broncho Bill captured the horses of the traitors, and the animals belonging to the dead guide, and brought for the actress and Lizette, Night Hawk had ridden back to the ambulance.

There he had heard her story of how she was seeking the ranch of one who had been most dear to her, and who had been killed by the Indians, hoping to find there his faithful negro servant, who could take her to the grave of his master.

In a few words Night Hawk told her that he had gone to the town with his brother and two others, to purchase supplies for his ranch, and to fit up for a work they had in hand.

One of those who had accompanied them was the negro whom she sought, and he was then on his way with the supplies to their home, along with his friend and ally, Red Wolf, a Comanche chief, who for some strange reason had deserted his people and come to the settlements.

Night Hawk told her that the negro, Scraps, could tell her all that she would know of the dead ranchero, who had left him his property, which consisted of his cabin and stock.

The cabin had been burned, the stock run off, and since then Scraps and Red Wolf had been with Broncho Bill and himself.

So Night Hawk told her, and more, for he made known that he and his brother had gone to the theater, had heard her sing, and then had learned from the landlord the next morning how she had started for the Ranchero's Rest, and they had at once started in pursuit, well knowing the danger she had to undergo, both from Indians and Cowboy Pirates.

"It was so noble of you and your brother to come to my aid.

"What prompted your great kindness toward me, and also to send me that exquisite present of the Mexican songbird, which the landlord of the hotel is keeping for me until my return.

"May I ask again what prompted your great goodness to me?"

"Common humanity alone should do so," replied Night Hawk, and he blushed like a young girl.

"That was not your only motive," she said, with the look of one who felt that there was another reason.

"To be frank with you, I will confess a secret, if you care to hear it."

"Did woman ever refuse to hear a secret?" she asked with a smile.

"Well, some time ago I was in New York on special business, and I was standing one day at my window, gazing out into the street.

"A door led into an adjoining room, and every word could be distinctly heard from where I stood, that was said in the adjoining chamber.

"I heard the door open, which led into the hall, and then a woman's voice broke forth with Annie Laurie.

"I was enraptured, for never had I heard such singing before.

"Then the voice ceased its song and entered upon a soliloquy which showed the singer had a secret.

"I could not depart from where I stood eaves-dropping, and soon the door opened and a man entered the room next to mine.

"Suffice it to say that I heard how he had made an appointment with the woman, who was his wife, to meet him there.

"I learned that he had saved the life of her father and herself, and believed to be rich and a gentleman, he had been received at her home.

"And more, her father, on the verge of bankruptcy had almost forced her to become that

man's wife, she severing her engagement with a young soldier lover, to marry him.

"Her father died, left nothing, and the adventurer, her husband, treated her cruelly.

"She left him, took another name and went upon the operatic stage.

"He tried to force her to come back to him, but that day, in the room next to mine, she accused him of being her father's murderer and threatened him with the gallows, if he ever crossed her path again.

"They left the room, and I never saw them: but when I heard your voice last night I almost recognized it from the first, but when you sung Annie Laurie, I was certain.

"My brother Will and myself both felt sure that we had seen you before, and then it came to us that it was your miniature which the young ranchero had given Scraps to return to you with your letters, when he was wounded and dying.

"I sent the miniature and letters, for Scraps, and I saw your letter of reply, and to be sure, we sent you that Mexican songbird, and your note of thanks showed us that the writing was the same.

"Now you know all that I can tell, and we will, after we bury your unfortunate guide, head off Scraps with our supplies, and from him you can learn all that you would know."

She held forth her hands in silence and grasped the scout's, for she could not speak.

Her heart was too full to find words.

But an hour after they were on their way to strike the trail that Scraps and Red Wolf must come, and thus head them off.

They had done so, and it was in the camp, after the arrival of the negro and the Indian, that they are presented again to the reader, and what Scraps had to tell of his master, the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCRAPS TELLS HIS STORY.

WHEN the beautiful actress, Mademoiselle Cleopatra, as she was known to the public, met Scraps, she grasped his hand warmly, and the tears came into her eyes.

Perhaps it was from the remembrance that the strong hand of the negro had been the last to hold in it the hand of her dead lover.

With rare delicacy of feeling, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had asked Red Wolf to stand on watch, while they went to work to make a "wicky-up," telling Lizette if she would get for them the blankets and traps from their ambulance, they would make snug quarters for her mistress and herself for the night.

This left the actress and the negro together, just as the brothers had intended.

"Missy, yer does look mighty like yer pictur', which Mars' Henry ust ter carry with him al-lus, and I didn't think a Injun ar-rer could hurt him while he weared it as a charm," said Scraps, gazing with honest admiration upon the beautiful woman, who replied in a low tone:

"Tell me of him, Scraps."

"Lady missy, I is only too glad ter talk about Mars' Henry; but whar shall I begin?"

"Tell me of his home, his early life and all."

"Waal, missy, we libed on de ole plantation, far away in Alabama, as yer knows, and I were Mars' Henry's body-servant."

"Then he went ter West Point ter be a sojer officer, and left me at home with his pa and ma."

"Arter that he graduated and went on ther Nebraska border, and he tuk me along for his body-sarvint ag'in, and that are whar I l'arned a leetle o' scoutin' and Injuns, who is wuss lor yellor niggers, missy, a heap sight wuss."

"Massa were called home by the death o' old massa and mistis, and I went along in course; but arter that he l'arned that you had got married and it well-nigh kilt him."

"So he give up his lieutenant's place in the army and went to the plantation; but he c'u'dn't stay thar, it were so lonesome, and so I says to him he better come to Texas."

"So he sells out and here he comes, and I wish somebody hed kilt me afore I said come here."

"We got a nice ranch and Mars' Henry call it Ranchero's Rest."

"Then we got some mustangs and cattle, and he seem in better speerits here, though he was allus mighty sad."

"Then come that bad day, when the Injuns chased us, Mars' Henry got an ar-rer in him, and, but for some sojers from the fort, we'd hev been tuk right then and kilt."

"But, missy, ebervy one o' dat band o' Injuns am dead, for dem gemmans you sees yonder, dem as folks calls de Buckskin Brothers, dey jist led de sojers ontu dem red-skins, and wipe

'em out and so got revenge for poor Massa Henry."

"But we crossed on to ther timber, and I left Mars' Henry lyin' down, while I went arter water for him."

"He told me he were gwine ter die, and gib me yer pictur' and told me ter git yer letters and send 'em with it and tell you how he died."

"When I went arter water, some Ingins as was in ther timber suddintly come ont'er me and run me fur off."

"I hid in an ole cabin all night, and next day they was gone."

"So I went back, and I seen how they had taken Mars' Henry's horse and mine, and his clothin', and the wolves had almost eaten him up."

The woman groaned, in the anguish wrung from her soul at this recital of the harrowing death of her lover.

"But I buried what were thar ter bury, and so were startin' home, when I seen Red Wolf, the Comanche comin', as a prisoner to two Cowboy Pirits."

"I laid for 'em, as they were gwine ter burn poor Red Wolf, and I kilt one and t'other got away."

"So Red Wolf and me was pard's right off, and he went home with me."

"But the two wicked cowboys Mars' Henry had, they was determined to git his ranch, his cattle and the money and papers in the tin box, which was hid away."

"But I wouldn't tell 'em, so they 'cuse me and Red Wolf o' killin' Mars' Henry, and was goin' ter hang us."

"They sent off to ther ranches and got more bad cowboys like they was, and, missy, they was draggin' us up when up ride dem two gemmans, dem Buckskin Brothers, and dere was no hangin' dat day for sart'in," and Scraps laughed heartily at the remembrance of the scene.

"The Powell brothers saved your life, then?"

"Yas, missy, and Red Wolf's, too, and dat Injun would jist hab died wid humiliation to be hanged, for he hab sich pride."

"Yer might kill him, burn him and all that, and he wouldn't care half as much; but to hang a Injun keeps him out o' his happy huntin'-grounds."

"And, missy, dem Buckskin gemmans jist waltzed in and says no hangin' was gwine ter happen."

"And though there was ag'in 'em four to one, dem cowboys jist crawled out o' it, you kin bet, missy."

"And they risked their lives, these noble men, to save you and the Comanche chief, as they did to rescue Lizette and myself?" asked Mademoiselle Cleopatra, with deepest interest in the story told her by the negro, as well as what he had said regarding the two noted plainsmen.

"Oh, yes, missy, dat is a way dey hab of doin'."

"Dere hain't no one on dis border as keers ter tackle 'em, and yit dey is as peaceable as Mary's leetle lamb."

"Dey don't see nobody imposed on, and when dey means business, waal, folks as don't want ter die had better git."

"And who are these gentlemen, Scraps, for in spite of their being here on the wild frontier, in spite of the fact that it is the last place where one would expect to find gentlemen leading the dangerous life that they do, they certainly are such."

"Yas, missy, dey is gemman and no mistake, and dey has been good friends o' mine, as dey is ob everybody in distress."

"I has joined 'em fer keeps, and I reckons death alone are goin' ter git me away from 'em."

"Well, Scraps, I am more than thankful to you for your story, and I wish you to keep this as a reminder of me," and Mademoiselle Cleopatra held forth a purse filled with gold.

"No, indeed, missy! I wouldn't touch no gold you gib me, for I believe Mars' Henry's ghost would rise right up arter me."

"I hain't done nothin' ter deserve it, and I has plenty of money to git what I needs."

"But you hain't goin' on ter see Mars' Henry's grave now, missy?"

"No, for Mr. Night Hawk Powell, and his brother also, think it would be taking a desperate risk, as the Comanches are on the war-path, and those Mexican outlaws, you call the Cowboy Pirates, are also raiding the country. They promise me that if I will come again to the town, when there is less danger on the border, they will escort me to the ranch where Mr. Harcourt is buried."

"Waal, I'll be in that party, sart'in; but

missy, if Mars' Night Hawk and Mars' Broncho say don't go, it are right, for they knows, dey does, for a fact, missy."

It having been decided that Mademoiselle Cleopatra and Lizzie should return to the town, the two Brothers in Buckskin started back with them, while Scraps and the Comanche were to go slowly on toward the ranch of the scouts and await their coming, for they had a special duty to perform which will soon be revealed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCOUT'S INFORMATION.

FORT DREADNAUGHT was one of those advance posts, from which the brave soldiers were wont to bid defiance to their red-skin foes.

It was situated as far toward the Indian country as was safe, with only a small force to guard it, and was a barrier to beat back the red-skin marauders when they were upon their murderous expeditions upon the settlements.

With earthworks, upon which was planted a stockade wall, Fort Dreadnaught was not as strong as might be wished; but still, with a light battery of four guns, a battalion of infantry and three companies of cavalry, it held its own remarkably well and was a terror to red-skins and outlaws alike.

In spite of this force, which was augmented by scouts, guides and hunters, and the usual hangers-on about an outpost, the Indians would now and then flank it, and dash in upon the settlements, and strike a rancher's cabin, running off stock, and leaving a red trail behind them.

Then, too, upon the Rio Grande frontier there were a number of outlaws, some Mexicans, and other renegade Americans, who had fled to save their necks for crimes they were guilty of, who made it dangerous for dwellers near the river, and for Government and emigrant trains on the trail.

Sometimes these outlaws were bold enough to make a dash in among the settlements, and, as these were men who had fled across the river from Texas soil, they were given the name of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande.

With a vast territory to guard, and the settlements scattered, the ranches far apart, the brave soldiers of Fort Dreadnaught had their hands full indeed, and Major Loring, the gallant commander, was ever willing to get outside aid when he could do so.

The ranch of the "Powell Pards" was a long way from the fort, yet so situated as to be beyond the attacks of Comanches and Cowboy Pirates.

Still Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were not men to hang back because they were out of danger, where others needed their aid.

Their ranch was a fine one, and they had quite a large herd of cattle and a number of mustangs.

The cabin was large and comfortable, and there dwelt their mother, whom the two boys fairly idolized.

They surrounded her with many luxuries seldom seen in a frontier home, and a woman of firmness and great intelligence, she managed the ranch well in the absence of her sons.

Knowing the country as they did, and anxious to serve their fellow-men, both Night Hawk and Broncho Bill had gone to the fort and offered their services to Major Loring whenever he should need them.

Having called upon them on a number of occasions and found them in every way superior plainmen to his own fort scouts and guides, the major was glad to have them come often to the outpost, for they seldom arrived without bringing some valuable information with them.

Several days after the rescue of Mademoiselle Cleopatra and her maid from the Cowboy Pirates, Major Loring was seated in his quarters, when a handsome young officer entered and said:

"Major, your wish of this morning, that the Powells would come, is to be gratified, for they are coming across the prairies."

"Indeed I am glad to hear this, Dana: but are they alone?" said the major.

"No, sir, for their inseparable pards, the negro and the Comanche, are with them."

"What a strong team those four make, Dana; but have Night Hawk and Broncho Bill come at once to my quarters, when they arrive."

"Yes, sir," and Lieutenant Frank Dana went to meet the coming scouts.

He greeted them most warmly, as they rode up, and leaving their horses with Scraps, the Buckskin Brothers accompanied the handsome young officer to the quarters of the commandant.

"Glad to meet you, gentlemen; be seated,

please, and let me tell you that I was wishing this morning for your coming."

"We are here, major, and have come to make a report to you," said Night Hawk.

"Anything very important?" asked the major, feeling assured that it was, from the coming of the two scouts.

"Yes, sir, for not only are the Comanches getting bolder on the trail, but also the Cowboy Pirates are becoming a more dangerous element," Broncho Bill remarked.

"I feel that you are not men to be frightened at an Indian's shadow, so I await your story with interest."

"Be seated, Dana, for the Buckskin Brothers may have another chance for you to win fame, as they did when you were last on the trail with them."

"I am but too willing to go on any trail where Night Hawk and Broncho Bill Powell are my scouts," said the young officer.

"The truth is, Major Loring, that the Comanches intend making a raid somewhere in force, for they have several large parties of braves out now, evidently reconnoitering for an opening in our lines."

"Their intention will be to make for a given point with the three different bands, and there unite, which will give them considerable of a force, and make a sweep down the line of settlements."

But where are the three bands now, Night Hawk?" asked the major.

"They are some forty miles apart, sir, in the hunting-grounds, and pretending to be hunting-parties; but they have human game, not buffaloes in view, I am sure."

"When do you think they will strike?"

"Perhaps within the week, sir."

"And it can be prevented in but one way?"

"Yes, sir, by taking as large a force as you can spare and attack the bands one after the other."

"This will drive them back again to their own country for awhile; but it looks to me as though they meant to hit us hard at some day not very far distant."

"You are right; but we will hit them first, for I will take the trail with a company of infantry, mounted, two companies of cavalry and two field pieces, and I will depend upon you for my scouts, gentlemen?"

"I am willing, sir, and I know Will is also," replied George Powell.

"How many red-skins are there in each band?"

"On our way here, sir, we reconnoitered near the different bands, and I think there are fully a hundred braves in two of the parties, and half as many more in the third, and the largest number are nearest the fort."

"Well, I will order preparations at once made," and calling an orderly the major gave the requisite orders, and then resumed the conversation with the two scouts.

CHAPTER X.

TROOPERS ON A RAID.

THAT night, soon after darkness came on, Major Loring rode away from the fort, at the head of over a hundred gallant soldiers.

In advance were the Buckskin Brothers, leading the trail to surprise the Comanches who, under the pretense of hunting, were lying in wait for a chance to strike a deadly blow against their pale-face foes.

It was just before dawn, when the major was awakened by Night Hawk, who came to his side as silently as a shadow, for the soldiers had halted an hour before in a clump of bushes, while the scouts went on ahead to find out just where the red-skins were, and all except the sentinels had gone to sleep, for it had been a long, hard ride during the night.

"Ah, Night Hawk, you are back, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your brother?"

"Is over by the Indian camp."

"Ah! you found them then where you supposed they were?"

"Yes, sir, and you had better mount and prepare to attack, for they seem to fear no danger, their guards not being two hundred yards from their camp."

Orders were at once given to mount, and the column started on its way, the major riding ahead with Night Hawk.

As they neared the timber, in which was the Indian camp, a form suddenly arose before them, as though out of the prairie.

The major started, as though they had ridden upon an Indian sentinel; but Night Hawk said quickly:

"It is Will, sir."

The horse of Broncho Bill, which had also been lying down upon the prairie, now arose, and the major halted the column.

"They are not yet awake, sir, for not a sound have I heard over in the timber," said Broncho Bill.

"Then we will give them a complete surprise, thanks to you," the major responded.

"Major Loring, would it not be well, sir, to turn the guns upon them from here, and after four shells have bursted in the timber, the cavalry can charge, for they will be completely panic-stricken, and their ponies will stampede under the fire of the heavy guns?" suggested Broncho Bill.

"The very idea," said the major, and the two guns were dragged up to the top of the rise and the gunners ordered to fire twice in rapid succession, aiming to burst the shells directly in the timber.

The cavalry, under Lieutenant Frank Dana, were then ordered to be ready to charge, as soon as the mounted infantry had delivered a volley, following upon the fire of the heavy guns.

With startling roar, the two six-pounders burst forth in the still hour before dawn, and the shells, well aimed, exploded directly in the timber.

Again the deep-mouthed guns belched forth, and then followed the rattling volleys of firearms, after which came the ringing command:

"Charge!"

With cheers the cavalry dashed forward, Lieutenant Dana leading, and with one of the daring scouts upon either side of him.

The roar of the guns, the bursting shells, scattering death on all sides, the pattering of bullets from the infantry into their midst, and the cheers of the cavalry as it thundered on, created a wild panic among the Comanches and stampeded their ponies.

A moment more and the cavalry were upon them, and short and sharp was the struggle that followed.

A few of the Comanches mounted their ponies and fled, others sped away on foot, and many more fell in the fierce combat.

But the cavalry pressed on in pursuit, and their way lay toward the other bands, the nearest of which was two-score miles distant.

The infantry and guns followed, after a hasty burial of the dead and the capturing of the ponies flying wildly about the prairie.

With a number of men mounted upon fleet horses, the young lieutenant pressed the flying red-skins so hard that they were forced to turn aside and seek refuge in the hills, which was just what he wished, that the other bands might be surprised.

Without following them to the hills, he sent back word for the major to press on, and that night, after several hours' rest, the second band of Comanches were surprised in their camp and another complete victory was won.

But a number got away in the darkness, and knowing that they would inform the third band of what had happened, and cause its retreat with all haste back to the red-skin stronghold, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill suggested that the column should march with all haste to head them off.

This the major was glad to do, and the tired soldiers and horses were forced along through the night, guided by the Buckskin Brothers to a point which they said the Comanches would pass on their way back to their village.

They reached there before dawn, utterly worn out, but at once prepared to receive the red-skins, who they knew must soon appear, if they had retreated at once upon hearing of the disaster falling upon their comrades.

It was just daybreak when Night Hawk and Broncho Bill, who, like their two splendid horses, seemed to know no fatigue, came dashing up to where the soldiers were standing in line, and reported the Indians coming across the prairie, and riding hard.

"Half an hour more and it would have been light enough for them to have seen our trail, and doubled on us," said Broncho Bill.

"But they will not suspect our being here, as long as it is too dark yet for them to see our trails," Night Hawk rejoined.

Fifteen minutes more and the Indian column appeared in sight, stretched out in a long, straggling line over the prairie.

"Charge!"

The command came from Major Loring, and cut of their hiding-place dashed the cavalry.

The red-skins uttered yells of alarm, hate and warning, and tried to rally to meet their foes.

But the guns opened upon the straggling line, sending shells bursting over the startled braves,

and the infantry also poured in a hot fire, and a third victory was won by the worn-out but gallant soldiers.

Grasping a hand of each of the Buckskin Brothers, Major Loring said with feeling:

"We owe our victory to you, Night Hawk, and your brother, Broncho Bill, and this severe blow upon the Comanches will prevent the raid upon the settlements which they intended.

"But now let us go into camp and get some rest and breakfast, which we all need, and afterward I will talk to you about the daring plan you suggested of running these Cowboy Pirates to earth, and which I believe you can do."

Soon after the soldiers went into camp, for the horses were broken down, and the fleeing red-skins could not be pursued into the hills.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SCOUT'S RESOLVE.

AFTER the dead had been buried, Indians as well as soldiers, for Major Loring was a humane man, and the wounded cared for, the scouts breakfasted with the commander and his officers, around the headquarters camp-fire.

"Now, Night Hawk, I wish to have a talk with you and Broncho Bill, about your proposed plan to root out those infamous outlaws, the Cowboy Pirates," said the major, after several hours of rest had refreshed him from the fatigues of the past thirty-six hours.

"Well, major, I will tell you just what Will and I know, and what we deem we can do," answered Night Hawk.

"That is just what I wish to learn, for you hinted that you had had trouble with the outlaws of late."

"Yes, sir, and it was in this way:

"We had gone to town to have our weapons overhauled, and to buy ammunition and supplies, for we intended a little scout upon our own hook.

"While there we learned that a lady had gone out upon the prairie, a ride of two days, to visit the grave of one dear to her, and that she had been accompanied by her maid, while, as an escort she had Otis, the guide, and two men who were supposed to be good prairie men.

"Knowing the desperate chances she took, Will and myself left the Comanche and Scraps to come on with our supplies, and we struck the trail of the party, which had some seven or eight hours' start of us.

"We noted that they had pushed on at a tremendous pace, and the next morning hit upon a scene that proved we were just in time to prevent trouble."

"You generally are," said Major Loring, with a smile.

"Well, sir, it seems that the two prairie-men were nothing more than secret members of the Cowboy Pirates, and they had sent a messenger on ahead, when they were engaged as escorts, to inform the outlaw leader, Captain San Cruz, that they were coming, and with one that would be a valuable person to hold for ransom, or who had money and jewels enough with her to make her a rich prize.

"They evidently appointed a certain piece of timber as a rendezvous, and arriving there they put an end to the brave young guide, Otis, by killing him.

"The lady suspected them, for some reason, and so determined to try and escape.

"This she attempted, when opportunity offered, and was flying from the two men, who had ridden ahead of the ambulance, when Will and myself came upon the scene.

"The Cowboy Pirates were also not far behind, and pursuing; but we went to the rescue, and after ending the career of the two traitors, the outlaws put back over the prairie."

"And yet were two to one against you, I'll wager," said the major.

"They were six in number, I believe, sir; but we went with the lady and her maid to where we headed off Scraps and Red Wolf, and urging against her going to visit the grave, while the Indians were upon the war-path, and the Cowboy Pirates giving trouble along the border, we escorted her back to the town.

"It was upon our return, Major Loring, on the way to our ranch, that we discovered the three Comanche bands, and so after getting Scraps and Red Wolf from our ranch, we came here to give you warning."

"And the result has been a grand one, for the Comanches will not rally under this blow very soon, I think."

"I hope not, sir, though I fear they will not long remain quiet," Broncho Bill said.

"And about the Cowboy Outlaws?"

"Well, major, both Will and myself have become convinced that there are allies of the out-

laws on various ranches, who give them information as to trains, and herds which can be captured, and the movement of your troops."

"I have had the same idea, Night Hawk, and if I can get hold of any of these spies, I will hang them without trial," sternly said the major.

"It is our desire to hunt these spies down, and find out just who they are, sir, and to do so, we are going over to the old Mexican Mission that is in ruins, and make that our secret quarters."

"The old chapel and Mission-house which is said to be haunted, and for that reason avoided by pale-faces and red-skins alike?" asked Major Loring.

"Yes, sir."

"You are not afraid of ghosts then?" the major remarked, with a smile.

"The ghosts won't worry us, sir; though, brave as he is, Scraps don't like the idea of going there, and even Red Wolf seems to dread it," Broncho Bill remarked.

"Well, it will be a secure hiding-place for you, that is certain, for I feel assured that no outlaw will follow you there."

"So we think, sir, and by hiding our trails well, we can keep from being found out."

"And from that point gain much valuable information we think, major," added Broncho Bill.

"Doubtless; but you place yourselves within easy reach of the outlaws, if they find you out, and on the very line of raiding bands of Comanches," said Major Loring.

"True, sir; but there is no better place for us to find out what we would know, than to be right in the outlaws' country, so to speak, and we are resolved to go there."

The major was silent for a moment, and then said in an earnest tone:

"Both of you know that I am no believer in the supernatural, and I have not an atom of superstition in my composition; but I pledge you that one night, when I was returning from a dash over to the Rio Grande, with half a hundred cavalry, I saw that near that old ruined Mission which I have never been able to solve to my own satisfaction.

"We were passing near there on our return, and it was at night.

"Suddenly we beheld, for all of us saw it, a white-robed form standing ahead of us in the trail.

"It was bright moonlight, and what we saw was as ghostly a being as any believer in superstition could wish to have show itself as proof of the supernatural.

"I halted, and gazed upon it with amazement, and then rode forward alone.

"The white-robed form glided away, and went toward the old ruin.

"I spurred on in chase; but my horse was worn down by our hard ride, and I could only force him into a slow gallop.

"The specter-like form kept ahead of me and disappeared over the river-bank at the ford which led across to the hill upon which the ruin stands in the timber, as I have heard, for I never was there.

"I wanted to camp there that night; but my men showed a determined stand not to do so, and I yielded, so I could not solve the mystery of that specter-like form."

"We have been there twice, major, once by day and once by night, and failed to see your ghost; but I have often heard men say they had not only seen the white form, in passing near, but heard wild singing at times, and again shrieks, coming from the old ruin," Night Hawk said.

"Well, Major Loring, we will start for the ruin, as soon as we return to the fort and get Red Wolf and Scraps, and we hope to bring you a good report of the ghost," Broncho Bill rejoined.

"You are then resolved to go?" asked the major.

"Oh, yes, sir, and we expect to find something more substantial than ghosts to fight," Broncho Bill remarked.

"You are plucky fellows, and I wish you success."

"Could I leave the fort I would like to go with you," responded the major.

That afternoon the command set off upon its return to the fort, and the day after their arrival there, the Buckskin Brothers, accompanied by Scraps and Red Wolf, started on their secret trip to the Haunted Mission.

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN'S SECRET.

A STRANGE, weird old ruin was the old Mexican Mission and its adjoining chapel.

It was situated upon a hill rising out of the prairie, and with a deep, swiftly flowing stream splitting against its base and washing its steep sides.

A heavy growth of timber, untouched for many long years, completely sheltered the hill, and in the midst of the trees was the ruin, large, rambling and solid.

Many red deeds had been done there, for the dwellers in the Mission had been menaced by the Comanches, and thus was the place haunted by cruel and bitter memories.

And to this place, long shunned by hunters, soldiers, outlaws and red-skins, had the Brothers in Buckskin gone to make their camp, accompanied by their faithful allies, Scraps and Red Wolf.

They had approached the place by night, Scraps, full of negro superstition, hanging well back in the rear, and when a white form had barred their trail, he had set off at a run across the prairie.

Broncho Bill on the contrary, accompanied by his brother, had pursued, and lassoed the "ghost."

They found it to be no phantom, of course, yet strangely like one.

It was a woman clad in white and playing specter to keep men away from the old ruin where she had sought a haven of refuge.

Alone she dwelt there, living in a small room connecting with the ruined chapel, and with a snow-white horse and a large dog her only companions.

Her little room was by no means uncomfortable, for she had a rudely constructed bed there, a table, an easy-chair, books, a guitar and cooking utensils for her use.

Then too the larder was well supplied, and with bow and arrows, fire-arms and fishing-tackle she was able to supply herself with game and fish to meet all her wants.

A willowy form, a beautiful face, with large eyes and a wealth of jet-black hair, rendered her very beautiful.

And yet her face wore a look of sadness, her eyes seemed to be looking back into the past.

Who she was, other than that she was a Mexican, speaking English with a decided accent, neither of the Buckskin Brothers could find out.

That some one had brought her there, and that that some one supplied her regularly with food and ammunition, they could not but believe.

But who the "some one" was they had no means of knowing.

Caught in the coils of Broncho Bill's lasso, the strange woman had submitted to her fate without a word.

But she saw that those who had come there were men she could trust, and she begged them to keep her secret, and yet what her secret was they knew not.

They heard from her that she had been there for a long time, some two years, and they promised her that they would not make her presence known to any one.

Scraps had fled at sight of the white-robed form, but Red Wolf had gone after him and the negro had discovered that the strange dweller at the ruin was not a ghost.

Still he felt a certain awe of her and wished himself well away from the weird old Mission.

The Brothers in Buckskin, however, soon made themselves at home, there in the ruin.

A small cabin of saplings was built, a good grazing ground for the horses selected, and they went regularly into camp for a long stay, seemingly, while the woman, who well kept her secret, retained her home in the ruined chapel.

Grape-vines, hanging from a tall tree, with the aid of ropes, formed a ladder, by which the scouts could ascend above the adjoining timber and obtain a view of the prairie for many miles upon all sides.

Here a nest was built, where a man could sit serenely, and, hidden from view, obtain a sight of any one coming within ten miles of the timber.

From sunrise to sunset one of the four was to be constantly on duty in the "west," relieving each other every few hours.

"Well, Will, what do you think of this weird dweller in the old Mission?" asked Night Hawk, as he ascended to the top one afternoon when Broncho Bill was on duty.

"She has a secret, George, and she clings to it," was the reply of Broncho Bill.

"She does indeed, but have you no idea of what her secret may be?"

"I have thought that she might be a spy of the Cowboy Pirates, and yet, when I look into her beautiful, sad face, I feel that I wrong her."

"A suspicion of the same kind has crossed my mind, Will, and then vanished again instantly, when I have looked into her eyes."

"She is, however, the major's ghost."

"Oh, yes, she is the one he chased and could not understand about."

"I do not wonder that he could not solve the riddle, and that the superstitious soldiers believed her a ghost, for I certainly was half-way tempted to give the old ruin a wide berth when I saw her."

"And I; but now we are ready for work, so what shall be our first move?"

"Leave Scraps and Wolf here, while we go off on a scout to see if we cannot ferret out just who these spies of the Cowboy Pirates are."

"Let us start, then, to-night, and secretly give orders to Scraps and Wolf to watch the woman, so as to discover if she really is an ally of the outlaws."

"It can do no harm, if she is innocent, and if guilty will do a great deal of good, for I am determined to solve her secret."

"And I."

With this decision they descended from the nest, sent Red Wolf up to the nest to stand guard and began their preparations for a start after sunset, determined that the negro and the Comanche should keep their absence from the strange dweller of the ruin, as long as they could do so after their departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OUTLAW AND HIS SPY.

It was several days after the departure of the Buckskin Brothers from their camp at the old ruined Mission, that a horseman slowly crossed the Rio Grande, at a point where the country on both sides was very wild and rugged.

The horseman was dressed in the Mexican costume, and his saddle and bridle glittered with gold coins that ornamented them.

That he was a Mexican his dark complexion and general appearance indicated, and his face, though handsome, wore a sinister look.

He was armed with a pair of revolvers, a large knife, the hilt set with jewels, and wore spurs of solid gold, while his sombrero fairly blazed with precious stones, the rim being fringed with small gold coin.

Altogether he was a most attractive-looking person, and in Mexico might be well taken for some distinguished personage.

Having crossed to the American shore he halted his splendid horse in a canyon, and dismounted, while the animal fed upon the grass growing in the crevices of the rocks.

For a few moments he paced to and fro, his head bent down, his manner that of one in deep thought.

Then his horse pricked up his ears, gave a low snort and the rider stepped quickly to his side, ready to mount at an instant's notice, and with a revolver in hand.

Along the narrow canyon came the sound of hoof-falls, and soon after a horseman appeared in sight.

He was to all appearances a cowboy, for he wore the dress of one.

His hair was worn long, a Texan sombrero sheltered his head, and the flap was ornamented with a silver star.

A lariat hung at his saddle-horn, a rifle was at his back and in his belt were a pair of revolvers and a bowie-knife.

Heavy leather leggings came up above his knees, spurs of vast size were upon his feet, and altogether he was quite a formidable-looking personage.

His face was beardless, darkly bronzed by exposure and was reckless in the extreme.

"Well, Cap, here I am," he called out as he saw the man who barred his way.

"Yes, and punctual as usual, Tiger Tom," said the Mexican, speaking in English, but with a marked accent.

"I allus tries to be on time, Pard San Cruz, be it at a fight, a funeral or a weddin'," and the speaker threw himself from his saddle and turned his horse, a wiry mustang, loose, as though he had perfect confidence in him.

"Well, what news?" asked the Mexican.

"You didn't git the gal?"

"No, for those accursed Buckskin Brothers followed her trail and chipped in just a moment too soon for my men," said the Mexican, angrily.

"They were only two and your men were half a dozen."

"It made no difference, they won, and I lost."

"Well, I did my duty, for I sent you word of

the gal's coming, and that there was big money in it, if you tuk her and held her until the man as pays give you a call."

"Who is he?"

"Don't know, cap'n, no more than that he come inter town ahead o' ther gal, and hunted me up for ther job."

"He's a likely lookin' pilgrim, hed money to throw to ther birds, and he said as how he knew ther gal were ter make a visit out onter ther prarar and he wanted them as she hired ter git double pay by doin' as he told 'em."

"I promised to git him ther men, but ther landlord o' ther hotel whar ther gal put up secured ther guide, so I rung in but two o' my men and ther Buckskin Pards jist got away with 'em both."

"And the woman?"

"The Buckskin Pards tuk her back ter town and she left ter j'ine her comp'ny, fer she are a singer."

"And so escaped us?"

"Waal, for the time being, yas; but then she comes back again, as I heerd her tell ther landlord, so we kin pick her up then."

"What does she come for?"

"To visit some grave, I heerd."

"And the man who wanted me to make her a prisoner?"

"He's in town yet, waitin' for her to come back."

"How much was he to pay you?"

"He said, as I writ you, cap'n, that you was to capter ther gal and keep her until yer heerd from him."

"Then he were ter give yer a thousand pesos, and if yer could arrange it so as ter have her die, kilt by Comanches, or something like that, you was to git five thousand."

"It is not enough for taking a woman's life," shortly said the Mexican.

"Waal, they do come higher than men's lives; but maybe he'll give more."

"He pays you of course?"

"Yes, cap'n, I git a thousand pesos for arranging the matter."

"I will capture her, and see that she dies, when he wishes it, for ten thousand pesos, and so tell him."

"No more, no less."

"I'll tell him, cap'n."

"And now what news have you?"

"The Buckskin Brothers led the soldiers from the fort on a successful raid against the Comanches, so that they have had a set-back for awhile and Injuns is skeerce on ther trails now."

"That is bad, for I hoped their being on the war-path would cover up my work."

"Yas, but yer'll hev ter wait a bit now."

"Why don't you pick a quarrel with those two scouts, when they are in town, and kill them, for my men fear them more than they do any half hundred sldiers that may be sent after them."

"Cap'n San Cruz, I hain't pickin' no quarrel ag'in' them men, for I'd be ther fu'st ter turn up my toes."

"I'll ambush 'em some day, maybe, and call in the'r chips; but when men sets ter work to kill 'em in open fight, thar'll be a epidemic o' lead fever break out suddint."

"They hain't easy ter bury."

"I wish you could get them into a trap I will set for them."

"You set ther trap and I'll try and git 'em inter it, for they is to be feared, I kin tell yer, cap'n."

"Where are they now?"

"I dunno, cap'n; but like as not huntin' on ther trail of us Cowboy Pirates, for they is suddin in the'r movements."

"Well, I'll think up a chance to entrap them, for my men are really afraid of them even in our camp across the river."

"But have you any news of trains moving?"

"No, sir, and I only come because I was due here ter meet yer at this time and I wanted ter tell yer about ther Comanche shavin' got worsted, and also about ther gal and ther price ther pilgrim offers ter git rid o' her."

"All right, I'll do the work for gold, and the price I named, and I'll be here every Sunday afternoon, as before, to meet you."

"I'll be on hand, captain, or send a messenger, if I can't come."

"Any orders?"

"No," and the Mexican's manner indicated that the interview had ended.

The cowboy spy at once mounted his horse and rode away down the canyon, from whence he had come, while the Mexican stood in silent meditation gazing after him, and little dreaming that he was covered by a deadly weapon.

CHAPTER XIV.

A LOST HEIRESS.

A STRANGE fatality seemed to hold the Mexican robber chief to the spot, after the departure of his spy.

It had been his wont to make weekly trips to the canyon on the American side of the river, to meet Tiger Tom, the spy who was in his pay and stationed in the town of San Antonio.

As the Buckskin Brothers had surmised, there were a few lawless cowboys on the different ranches, who were secretly members of the band of outlaws, and to some of these, if he could not go himself, Tiger Tom was wont to go and send them with the information he had gleaned for the chief.

It was in this way that word had been sent to "Captain San Cruz," as the leader of the Cowboy Pirates was known, of the trip of Mademoiselle Cleopatra and Lizette into the prairie country, and which, but for Night Hawk and Broncho Bill would have proven fatal to them both, perhaps.

Tiger Tom was known to be a desperate character about the settlements, and was greatly feared.

He professed to be a cowboy, and yet seldom did any work as such, and made his money, it was said, gambling.

He certainly always had plenty of money to spend, and yet no one in the town had suspected him of playing a double game and being in league with the Mexican outlaws.

He had however the confidence of Captain San Cruz, and, as he enriched the latter by his spying work which told him when to strike a train, and its value, the chief took good care that his faithful spy should not suffer.

"Now I have again let him go without telling him I need his help to rid me of the one who stands between me and fortune, ay and honor, for no one would know me were I to shave off this beard, cut my long hair and appear in their midst, as he who had been San Cruz the chief of the Rio Grande Pirates."

"And I could tell them that I had been traveling in other lands until called back to get the fortune which she left me."

"But where is she? On Texan soil I am certain, for I have hunted Mexico over for her."

"Tiger Tom is faithful and I must set him to trail her down—yes, and kill her, for I dare not do it, though I would not hesitate to put another woman to death."

"But there must be proof of her death, or I can never get her fortune."

"Yes, Tiger Tom shall plot and carry it out for me, for I know she is in hiding in some Texan town."

"He must find her, and when she is dead, he shall be well paid."

"I will recall him."

As he spoke he raised a gold whistle to his lips and gave half a dozen shrill blasts.

The sound went ringing through the canyon, and his act caused two forms, crouching in a thicket up on the canyon's side and not forty feet above him, to shrink back into the shelter of the foliage.

Soon after the shrill sounds of the whistle had died away through the canyon and rocks, in a thousand echoes, there was heard the rapid clatter of hoofs and the next moment Tiger Tom appeared upon the scene.

He had his revolver in hand, as he drew rein, and said, as he saw the chief of the Cowboy Pirates calmly awaiting him:

"What's up, cap'n, for I heerd yer blow?"

"I am obliged for your prompt response, Tiger Tom, and it shows that you can be depended upon, for, believing me in danger you came to my aid, when many would have looked out for their own safety."

"Oh, I'm not one ter shirk when a pard needs aid."

"But hain't nothin' wrong with yer, cap'n?"

"No; but I called you to have a talk with you upon a private matter."

"I'm ready ter hear all yer has ter say, cap'n."

"Well, Tiger Tom, I need your aid."

"I'm thar."

"You must vow never to betray me, and if you do what I wish to have you do, then I will make you a rich man."

"Oh my! just let me git at 'em."

"Tom, you are a good trailer?"

"So folks says as knows me, cap'n."

"I wish to put you on the trail of a woman."

"Ther gal as my man wanted yer ter capter and git away with?"

"No."

"Another gal?"

"Yes."

"Whar is she?"
 "That is what I wish you to find out."
 "Who are she?"
 "You will keep my secret?"
 "You bet!"
 "There is a snug sum in it for you, enough to keep you for life."
 "I'm thar, I say."
 "The woman is my mother."
 "Oh, my!"
 "And I want you to track her."
 "Pard, I says plain to yer, it are a bad man as goes ag'in' his mother."
 "Listen to me while I tell you that she is not my own mother, but my father's second wife."
 "I see."
 "I was an only child, and my mother died when I was a little boy."
 "My father was a very rich man, but stern and cruel to me, so I began to lead a very reckless life, and many a dollar he had to pay for me, to save his name from dishonor, I frankly confess."
 "When I was twenty-one, my father married again."
 "His second wife was a beautiful girl, and one whom I dearly loved."
 "I will give her the credit of not having willingly married him, for it was a match her parents forced her into, for they were poor, and her father owed mine large sums."
 "I had hoped to win her, but yet she seemed not to care for me, and I was told that she was in love with an American officer, who had once saved her life, when her horse was swept away in crossing the Rio Grande."
 "Them kind o' things makes gals love men, I has heard," said Tiger Tom.
 "Without noticing the remark, the Mexican continued:
 "One day I learned that my father had made his will, leaving every dollar he had to his young and beautiful wife, and cutting me wholly off, on account of my wild ways."
 "I consulted a lawyer, and he told me that in case my father died, my mother would get the property, and it would be best for me to marry her myself."
 "Marry your mother?"
 "My step-mother."
 "Ah, yes!"
 "Well, the attorney also said that if I did not marry her, and she should die, then all would be mine."
 "I see."
 "Soon after, my father was thrown from his horse and killed, or at least it was so supposed, for he was found dead by the roadside and his mustang near him."
 "This left his wife his vast wealth."
 "I went to her and asked her, after a year of mourning, if she would become my wife; but she treated me with scorn, and I got revengeful."
 "This was four years ago."
 "Hating her, I began to persecute her for my revenge, and one day I learned that she had said she would have me put in prison."
 "I at once forestalled her by having her secretly taken to an insane asylum and incarcerated there, while her servants, in my employ, gave out that she was mad, and her property, too, was placed in the hands of trustees to manage."
 "Then I left the neighborhood, giving out that I was going to the United States."
 "I started, was captured by Mexican outlaws, and willingly joining them, I became their chief."
 "Soon after I heard that my step-mother had escaped from the mad-house, and no one knew what had become of her."
 "I trailed her to the Rio Grande, and I know that she crossed into Texas, and she is now doubtless in hiding in some town on the border."
 "I have here her miniature, and her name is Celina Delporte, and I wish you to find her for me."
 "When you have done so, report to me, and then I will arrange a plan by which she can be captured by Indians and put to death, and her body, carried to Mexico and recognized, will be proof of her death, and I will get her fortune."
 "Do you understand me, Tiger Tom?"
 "I does, for a fact, cap'n."
 "And you'll find her?"
 "I'll do my level best ter git on her trail."
 "Do so, and your fortune is made."
 "Here is her miniature, and remember her name is Celina Delporte."
 "I has got it all down fine, cap'n, and you kin bet I won't let no grass grow under my feet while I is a-huntin' fer thet fortin' I is ter git."
 "Well, next Sunday be here and report, or send a messenger, if you cannot come."

"I'll do it," and so saying Tiger Tom mounted his horse and rode away, while the outlaw chief remained in the canyon, once more seemingly lost in deep meditation.

CHAPTER XV.

NIGHT HAWK AND BRONCHO BILL ON SEPARATE TRAILS.

THE Buckskin Brothers seemed to have well decided upon their plan of action, before leaving their camp at the ruined Mission, for they wended their way at once toward the Rio Grande border.

They wished to obtain some point of observation on the river, and in the vicinity of a ford, where they could lie in wait for any one who might appear to be holding secret intercourse with the Cowboy Pirates.

Their way took them to a very wild country, where they knew the outlaws were wont to cross the river, for it gave them a good place to check a pursuit and get their stolen plunder and cattle over into Mexico.

Keeping away from all beaten trails, Night Hawk and Broncho Bill approached the river through the fastnesses of the surrounding country, and when near it sought out a place for their camp.

They found a good spot upon the banks of a little stream, and which was hidden away among the timber and canyons.

No man, excepting he was hunting for some special object, would like to wander that way, they felt assured.

The grass grew luxuriantly there, and the horses would therefore not suffer for food or water.

They cut some boughs and made them a wick-up, and then prepared to take a survey of the surrounding country on foot.

After several hours spent this way, they were returning to their camp, as night was approaching, when they struck a trail that seemed to be quite often traveled.

It led down to the river, and evidently across by a ford which they had not suspected, for the main fording-place was a mile below.

From the river the trail led up into the canyons and timber, and it seemed to be made by one horse, to judge by the hoof-tracks.

Following it they came to a canyon, and ever on the alert for danger, they wisely decided not to go through it, but to flank it by passing over the rocks and hills upon one side.

They had gotten well up among the rocks, when they heard the sound of hoofs.

Instantly they sprung to a thicket growing upon the top of the cliff overhanging the canyon, and there they quickly concealed themselves.

A moment after a horseman came into view. Many men, upon recognizing the horseman, as they did, would have fired upon him, to be sure of their game.

But Night Hawk and Broncho Bill were not in the least hurried, nor were they fearful that their game might escape.

So they calmly waited and watched. To their great delight, the horseman dismounted almost beneath them, and began to pace to and fro.

"It is San Cruz, the Cowboy Pirate chief," said Broncho Bill, in a whisper.

"Yes, and he is here to meet some one," answered Night Hawk.

"We are in luck," said Broncho Bill, in the same guarded tone.

A few moments after they heard the clatter of hoofs, and as a horseman appeared, Night Hawk said:

"Will, do you know him?"

"That big fellow we have often seen about the settlements, and whom they call Tiger Tom, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll soon know something, I guess."

And "know something" they did, for every word of the two men in the canyon reached the ears of the Buckskin Brothers.

They nodded to each other and smiled grimly when both Tiger Tom and San Cruz spoke of them, and when the chief was again alone they were about to command his surrender, when they discovered that he seemed in no hurry to depart.

So they waited, and beheld him give the call for Tiger Tom's return, and once more heard all that passed between the two.

When a second time Tiger Tom departed, they glanced at each other in silence, wondering why the chief still remained.

At length, as Broncho Bill made a motion, as though to demand his surrender, Night Hawk shook his head.

They dared not speak then, even in a whisper, so still was the air, and Broncho Bill saw the outlaw mount and ride off with surprise that his brother had restrained him by a shake of the head.

"He's gone, George," he said, quietly, feeling assured that his brother had some good reason for not having checked him.

"Yes, but he'll be here again next Sunday."

"Ah, yes, I half guess your motive now."

"Well, Will?"

"You wish to see if Tiger Tom has any report to make next Sunday."

"You read my thoughts often, Will, as I do yours."

"But I have another motive, and that is for you to go after that fellow Tiger Tom."

"Not to kill him?"

"Oh no, but to trail him back to town and find out who the man is that has paid him to deliver Mademoiselle Cleopatra into the hands of that murderous Mexican."

"A good idea, for by finding him out we will know just who to watch and to lay hands on as her foe next time."

"Yes, and it is my opinion that he is none other than her husband."

"Guess you are right, George; but what did you say his name was?"

"Keene Kendall."

"Yes, and I will spot him; but will you remain here?"

"No, I will return to the Mission and have a talk with that poor woman there."

"George, you've struck it, for you believe her to be the woman that Tiger Tom is to go on a still hunt for?"

"I feel sure of it."

"I do not think there is a doubt of it, for she is a Mexican, has been in hiding about two years, and what more natural than that she should hide away from one who she fears will either put her back in a mad-house or kill her."

"She has some friend, without doubt, and I will see if I cannot get her to tell me the truth about herself."

"I tell you, George, we are becoming regular detectives, and I hope we will have matters pan out as we wish; but when and where shall I meet you?"

"Right in our little camp, over yonder in the hills, next Saturday, so that we can be here to welcome San Cruz and Tiger Tom next Sunday," was the significant reply of Night Hawk, and soon after they started for their camping-place, and, after supper, departed upon their missions, each one taking different trails, and pledged to meet again on the Rio Grande within the week, or by the following Saturday if prevented from coming sooner.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCOUT DETECTIVE.

WHEN Broncho Bill went on his way after Tiger Tom, the spy of the Cowboy Pirates, he was not particular as to trailing him, feeling assured that he would meet him in San Antonio.

It was a long ride, and he was anxious to reach the town before the outlaw, so as to be on the ground ahead of him and watch his movements.

The splendid animal ridden by the handsome young scout seemed like his master, never to tire, and he kept on at a steady and rapid pace until many long miles had been cast behind him.

Camping for rest and food, when he felt that his horse needed it, Broncho Bill kept on at the same steady pace, and when he rode into the town, he was certain that the outlaw had not arrived.

The mustang of Tiger Tom he had noted was a good one; but then he seemed to have been pressed hard in the ride out to the rendezvous in the canyon with Captain San Cruz, and Broncho Bill was confident that his own noble steed had made much better time than most animals could have done.

He at once took him to the stable attached to the hotel, and paid a man liberally to look after him.

"What, back again, Powell?" said Landlord Hall, as Broncho Bill entered the hotel, and he extended his hand cordially in greeting, for the Buckskin Brothers were great favorites with him.

"Yes, landlord, I came back on a little matter of business," was the quiet reply.

"And are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Why, I never knew you and Night Hawk to separate before."

"Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no; but I left him in camp, and it does seem strange to be without him, for do you know, Mr. Hall, we seldom part company, we never had an unkind word pass between us in our lives, and both George and myself have one pocketbook between us."

"I tell you, Pard Hall, if his brother does say so, George Powell is one of the noblest men on earth."

"I believe you, Broncho, and he has got a brother Will that is very much like him, and I only wish we had more such men, for it raises my opinion of human nature to meet such as you and your brother George."

"But I have a letter for you."

"A letter for me?" asked Broncho Bill, blushing like a girl at the praise of the landlord.

"Yes, and I was wondering how to get it to you, for since the Comanches are on the war-path, and the Cowboy Pirates are raiding into Texas, as I hear, it is hard to find men going out toward your ranch."

"Why, who could have written to me and sent it here?"

"It is for you and Night Hawk both, and came from that beautiful singer."

"Ah!"

"She sent it in a letter to me and asked me to send it to you the first chance I got."

"Now go in to supper and I'll bring it to you."

Broncho Bill was hungry and very willingly did as requested, and the landlord soon brought him the letter.

It was addressed:

"MESSRS. GEORGE AND WILLIAM POWELL.
"Kindness of
LANDLORD HALL."

The contents of the letter were as follows:

"NEW ORLEANS, October 15th, 18—.

"ESTEEMED FRIENDS:—

"I write to suggest to you, as you know the secret of my unhappy life, that the one who instigated my capture at the hands of the outlaws was, I believe, my husband."

"I am sure that I recognized him in a box at the theater in Galveston, and also again last night in an orchestra seat at the Opera House here in New Orleans."

"Again to-day I went to bid a lady member of my company farewell, as she sailed on the Galveston steamer, and I am certain that my husband was also a passenger, and for some reason returning to Texas, having found out doubtless that I meant to go back there at an early date."

"I therefore write you, that you may understand that he has been dogging my steps, and he will without doubt make another effort to get me into his power."

"I send you within a photograph of him, and you will readily recognize the original should he cross your path."

"He is tall, fully six feet, and has a *distingue* air. Hoping to hear from you at an early date, that it will be possible for me to visit the grave at the Ranchero's Rest, without dread of Comanches and Rio Grande Pirates, and with every kind wish for your prosperity and happiness, believe me,

"Your affectionate friend,
"CLEOPATRA."

Broncho Bill read this letter over twice and then gazed for some time at the photograph, as though to impress it deeply upon his memory.

It certainly was a likeness of a very striking-looking man, and yet a face not to win confidence or love.

He recalled the story of the beautiful woman, of her loving the young ranchero, Henry Harcourt, and marrying, at the entreaty of her father, Keene Kendall, a man who had proven himself a villain.

That her husband, whom she had, in the hotel, when his brother Night Hawk had overheard all, accused of murdering her father, might indeed be dogging her steps, seemed natural to Broncho Bill.

He, and so had his brother, wondered that the Cowboy Pirates had attempted to kidnap her, and hold her for ransom, for that was not their way, and it now seemed most natural to him that Keene Kendall, fearful that his wife might carry out her threat to hang him, would wish to get her out of the way.

Then what he had heard pass between the outlaw chief and his spy, Tiger Tom, came into his mind, and he was convinced that the husband of the beautiful woman was the man who was trying to get rid of her and had offered gold to San Cruz to kill her.

"Yes, he is the man, and he dogged her to New Orleans for some purpose, and has now returned here to perfect his plans, knowing that she is to return."

"I will know the original of this face, wherever I may meet him, and I'll be on the watch for him," and Broncho Bill having finished his supper went out into the office of the hotel.

Suddenly he came face to face with a tall, fine-looking man, attired in a free and easy manner, and who was chatting pleasantly with the landlord.

"That is my man," muttered Broncho Bill, and without appearing to notice the stranger, while he overheard him ask:

"Landlord, who is that handsome young fellow in the buckskin suit?"

"Broncho Bill, we call him here, but his name is William Powell, and he is a Government scout and ranchero," replied the landlord.

"Ah yes, he has a brother, has he not, whom they call Night Hawk?"

"Yes; and two better men than those Powells never lived."

"Ah! were they not the ones who rescued that silly young actress, Mademoiselle Cleopatra, from some danger when she went upon the prairies for a lark some two weeks ago?"

"Yes, they rescued Miss Cleopatra from being captured by the Cowboy Pirates; but I found her anything but a silly actress, Mr. Kent."

"I meant silly to go upon such a foolhardy trip upon the prairies, only for her amusement."

"You are mistaken, sir, for she went to visit the grave of one who was very dear to her."

"Ah! and whose grave could it be?"

"I do not know, Mr. Kent," and the landlord turned away, and soon after was joined by Broncho Bill, who asked quietly:

"Mr. Hall, who was that very good-looking stranger you were talking to when I came out from supper?"

"His name is Kent, and he registers from Kentucky, while I believe he is here looking about him with a view of becoming a ranchero."

"He will be here some weeks, he told me, and I will introduce you to him if you wish."

"No, thank you, for I am not adding to my list of acquaintances just now," was the dry reply.

"He is rich, and appears to be a clever fellow."

"He doubtless is clever, for he looks it," was the quiet response of the scout, who had now thoroughly started upon his detective work.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT BRONCHO BILL OVERHEARD.

FOR some reason Broncho Bill was not pleased with the room given him by Landlord Hall in his hotel, although it certainly was a most comfortable one.

He said that he had rather change it, and asked if Number Fifteen was vacant.

"Yes, Mr. Powell, but it is a high-priced room, and Mr. Kent has Number Thirteen, the one next to it, and those were the two Miss Cleopatra and her maid occupied when here."

"I'll take Number Fifteen, Mr. Hall, for when I get a chance to live in luxury I might as well do so," was the reply, and Broncho Bill was shown to Number Fifteen.

A door, which was securely fastened, opened into Number Thirteen, and he heard some one moving therein.

"It is Mr. Kent, and I rather think I am in luck," muttered Broncho Bill, and he made preparations to retire, for he was very tired after his long and hard ride.

He did not make a sound, to allow the occupant of Number Thirteen to think this room held an occupant, and he had asked Landlord Hall to leave him down on the register as occupying the first room he had given him.

"You've got something on hand, Bill," said the landlord with a smile.

"If you think so, keep it quiet," please, and do me the favor not to let it be known that Number Fifteen has an occupant," was the reply.

The next morning, as Broncho Bill sat in his room, he heard steps in the hall, then a key opening a door and two persons entered Number Thirteen.

"Well, Tiger Tom, I am glad to see you back," said a voice which the scout recognized as that of the stranger, Kent.

"I'm glad ter git back, pard, fer it are dangerous work ridin' on ther paraders now; but has yer got neighbors?"

The last was asked in a low tone, but it reached the ear of Broncho Bill.

"No, that room is unoccupied, for I asked the landlord about it, before I asked you to come up."

"I believe in being cautious, pard, for I hain't one ter git my neck in a noose."

This was also said in a whisper, and stepping to the door between the rooms, Tiger Tom turned the knob.

But the door was locked.

Then he knocked loudly and called out:

"Ho, pard, would yer open up and obleege me with a match ter light my pipe?"

No response came, and the stranger said, somewhat impatiently:

"I told you the room was unoccupied."

"I guess it are, for it sounds silent in thar, as though it were full o' dead folks."

"Well, did you see the chief?" asked Mr. Kent.

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"He were sorry thet ther boys didn't git ther leddy inter his grip afore them Buckskin Pards overtook her."

"And so am I sorry; but I should have thought he could have kept them from rescuing her."

"Pard, when you has seen them Powell Brothers in a scrimmage, you'll onderstand why it are that ther cap'n and his men c'u'dn't capture ther leddy."

"Why they is good ag'in' any four-hand game yer kin play ag'in' 'em, and I knows brave men as wouldn't want ter run on 'em unless they was four ter one."

"One of them is here now?"

"Where?"

"Here in this hotel."

"One on 'em?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

"The one they call Broncho Bill."

"Then Night Hawk are dead."

"Dead?"

"Sart'in, for they is as onseparable as ther Siamese Twins I has heerd on."

"He may not be dead; but Landlord Hall said that Broncho Bill was here alone."

"Lordy, what a chance for me."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean it am a glor'ous chance ter pick a row with Broncho Bill and wing him, for alone he won't dare face me and my Revolver Musicians, as I kin muster four for a leetle game o' bluff and skill, I guess, whar it are a chance ter git rid o' ther young chap in Buckskin."

"Well, that is your game to play, but I don't wish to interfere with you carrying out my plans."

"It hain't goin' ter, fer I'll jist lay fer ther Buckskin ter-night in ther bar-room and wipe him out soon as I kin pick a quarrel with him."

"Do as you please, and I'd be glad if you did get rid of him, for I feel revengeful against him and his brother for rescuing the woman I wished to get into your chief's hands."

"But tell me, did you tell your chief what I told you?"

"Yes, pard, and he says killin' wimmens is high-priced, and he wants ten thousand for the job."

"I'll not give it."

"Then the gal don't die."

"He would rob me."

"Like as not, if he got the chance."

"Well, I suppose I will have to yield to his devilish demands."

"Yer might save yer money and kill her yer-self."

"No, I must not be known in this matter, and it must appear as though she was slain by red-skins."

"All right, pard; but is she coming back?"

"Yes, for I followed her as far as Boston, and she is coming back within a few weeks and intends to make that trip to the grave, and those two Buckskin Brothers are to be her guides."

"Ther mischief yer say, pard!"

"Yes."

Tiger Tom gave a low whistle.

"What is the matter?"

"Pard Kent, I'd rather she had a guard o' a squad o' soldiers than them two."

"They are but men, and only two."

"You must watch for their starting, inform your chief, so that he will be ready, and then have him, disguised as Indians pounce down upon them."

"If the woman is killed by the firing, so much the better, but you must have two of your men pretend to have been her guards, engaged in the trail by this Powell, and escape to tell of her fate and who she was."

"I'll give them papers to hand to a lawyer here, who will communicate with attorneys North, and let them know how she died, for that is my little game, you know."

"All right, pard, it shall be as you say, if you will pay the chief his price."

"I will have to do it."

"And mine, pard?"

"I will do well by you too.
"Now you had better go and tell the landlord I think of engaging you as guide to show me some ranches that can be bought."

"I'll do it, pard; but if yer wants me, yer knows I stops at the t'other hotel which hain't so tony as this here one."

"Good-morning, pard."

So saying Tiger Tom left the room, and every word said had been overheard by Broncho Bill.

As he passed along the hall Tiger Tom, with some lingering dread of that next room stopped and tried the knob.

It was securely fastened and apparently satisfied the outlaw passed on.

Had he opened the door it would have been the last act of his life, for Broncho Bill stood facing it, revolver in hand, and knowing that Tiger Tom would have shot, he was ready for him, and the *Detective Scout* never missed his aim.

CHAPTER XVIII. A BULLY BULLIED.

BRONCHO BILL hated to do a mean act.

It was not his nature to take an advantage, and yet he felt that he was not very far wrong in listening to the conversation of the two villains in the adjoining room to him, for there was life at stake, and the life of a defenseless woman at that.

Having been made aware of the designs of the man Kent, and his tool, Tiger Tom, to carry out his plan he felt that he must act with caution, for to have suspicion aroused would be to thwart him.

So he kept out of sight as much as was possible, and appeared to be in town simply to make some purchases.

He strolled into the saloon that night, as he was anxious to have matters brought to an understanding between Tiger Tom and himself, who knew, after what he had overheard him say, would attempt to get the best of him by some sort of treachery.

Tiger Tom was in the saloon, along with a number of others, and Kent was there also.

The desperado had arranged his plans to get Broncho Bill into a trap at the first moment that he could do so, as he was there without his brother, and this the young scout felt certain of and meant to act accordingly.

As I have said before Tiger Tom was greatly feared by all, and when Broncho Bill strolled into the saloon he was talking to a group of admirers, or men who were listening to him from fear of offending him did they not do so.

Broncho Bill walked leisurely up to the group, and every eye was upon him.

Tiger Tom was a trifle nervous, for his gang had not arrived, that he meant to use against the scout.

Still he could not suspect that Broncho Bill had aught against him.

To all present the young scout was known, and not one but admired him, as they did also his daring brother Night Hawk.

Having obtained a position that suited him, Broncho Bill suddenly wheeled and faced the bully, and his clear voice was heard by all, as he said:

"Tiger Tom, I have heard that you intend to fix me to-night."

"Do you wish trouble with me, or do you back down?"

Tiger Tom was fairly startled.

He knew that he had made several threats publicly about getting into trouble with the young scout, and forcing him to back down, and now his words were flung into his teeth.

He was a dead-shot, and quick at drawing; but he knew the man before him was quicker, and never missed.

He had hoped that alone, with Night Hawk away, Broncho Bill would not show his wonted pluck; but right here he found himself mistaken.

Broncho Bill faced him, his hands hanging by his side, for he was not one to grasp a revolver until he meant to use it.

His dark-blue eyes fairly blazed as he turned them upon the bully, and yet his face otherwise was perfectly serene.

A hush like death fell upon the crowd, and only the movement of eyes turning from Broncho Bill to Tiger Tom prevented those present from appearing like so many wax figures, so motionless were they.

Completely nonplused, it was long, or it seemed so in that awful suspense, before Tiger Tom replied.

He dared not make a motion toward his revolver in his belt, as he knew he would be dead ere his hand reached it.

At last he said:

"Pard Broncho, I hain't nuthin' ag'in' you, and somebody's bin a-lyin' about me."

All gave a sigh of relief.

There was not one in that saloon then who had heard the desperado's boasts, unless it was Kent, whom he had told he would corner Broncho Bill and fix him.

At his words the young scout laughed, and then came his reply, calm and yet to the point:

"You did make boasts against me, and denying it now, when face to face with me, proves you to be a liar as well as a coward."

"Don't brag, Tiger Tom, for it puts you in a bad light."

With this Broncho Bill walked across the saloon toward the door, still keeping his eye, however, upon the bully, whom he had so successfully bullied.

As he passed out of the door all eyes were upon Tiger Tom.

The face of the desperado was livid, for he saw that he had "lost his grip," with his toadies and yet he knew, as they did, for him to have attempted to draw a weapon upon Broncho Bill would have been the signal for his death.

He had boasted, and he had not maintained his words.

To get out of a bad scrape he turned with a scowl upon those about him, while he said:

"I likes that man, as I does his game-cock brother Night Hawk, and I hain't said nothing ag'in' him, and some gerloot hev lied about me."

"Maybe, some o' ye thinks I is lyin' and wishes ter say so!"

He dropped his hand upon his revolver as he glanced scowlingly over the faces about him.

But no one took up his challenge, and the bully walked away from the crowd.

As he passed out of the door, Kent was there and said in a low tone:

"It was a clean back-down on your part, Tiger Tom, but I don't blame you, for that man would be a devil if turned loose to shoot."

"You hedged on the crowd well though, and may not have lost your hold."

Tiger Tom looked fiercely at Kent for an instant, and then said savagely:

"I know when I'm at a dead sure funeral, pard, and when I isn't."

"That was Broncho Bill's call; but next time it will be mine, for I has a good memory, and his days is numbered."

CHAPTER XIX. THE LETTER.

HAVING accomplished his purpose in going to town, Broncho Bill decided to at once start back to the camp at the old Mission, having to catch his brother there before he should depart for the canyon rendezvous on the Rio Grande.

He had not only found out the part Tiger Tom was playing to capture the beautiful singer, or place her in the hands of San Cruz, but he had discovered in the man calling himself Kent, the husband of Mademoiselle Cleopatra, and that he was indeed the one, as her letter had stated, who was her foe.

She had spoken to Night Hawk and himself about her villainous husband, as a man who was very poor, living by his wits alone, and who had sought to come back to her only when he found that she was winning fame and fortune with her superb voice.

And yet this husband, in the guise of Kent, certainly had plenty of money to live as he was at the hotel, and to spend what he did for the getting rid of his wife.

This fact worried Broncho Bill not a little.

"He's struck it rich, in some mysterious way," he mused, as he went to his room to prepare for his start.

"But what can be his motive in spending so much money to get rid of his wife, when a short while ago he wished her to take him back?"

"There is a mystery here to solve, that is certain; but I guess George and I can work it out in time—come in."

The last was said in response to a knock at the door.

At the call there entered the landlord, and he said:

"Another letter for you, Mr. Powell."

"It must be from the same one, for I expected no other here."

"It is, and sent in my care."

Broncho Bill took the letter, which was addressed in the hand of the actress.

It was dated at New Orleans, as the other had been, and was as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIENDS:—

"I find that, owing to the burning of an opera house, where I was to appear for the two next weeks, I can more readily come to Texas than at another

time, and I send this by mail at once, that it may reach your hands at the earliest moment.

"I also saw by the papers that the commandant of Fort Dreadnaught, under your guidance, had struck several severe blows upon the Comanches, which will serve as a lesson to them for some little time, and I feel, as I am to be idle for two weeks, not caring to make another engagement under existing circumstances, and the fact that there will now be less dread of the Indians, that now is my time to make my proposed visit to the grave of Henry Harcourt."

"You may think it strange in me that I am so persistent in this determination, being, as I am, a married woman; but remember that he who lies in his prairie grave, I loved with all my soul, and the one whose wife I became I did not love when I married him, and since despise and hate."

"I became his wife at the urgent entreaty of my dying father."

"Having driven poor Harcourt to Texas, and thus indirectly to his death, I wish to do penance by visiting his grave, and, as I am something of an artist, it is my intention to sketch it and its surroundings, having a painting made therefrom when I reach New York and thus keep it ever before me."

"You may therefore expect me about next Tuesday, and Lizette will be my only companion."

"I shall leave here as soon as my engagement ends, and I beg of you to have all in readiness for my trip, and engage as many men as you deem necessary as an escort."

"I have asked good Landlord Hall, to whom I send this, to forward a special messenger with it to you."

"Hoping soon to see you, believe me,
"Your attached friend,

"CLEOPATRA."

"P. S.—Lizette is a good Catholic, and each night says a prayer for you for having saved us from the clutches of those dreaded outlaws."

Broncho Bill read this letter very attentively, and then he said to the landlord:

"Mr. Hall, I wish to ask you to do me a favor."

"Certainly."

"Mademoiselle Cleopatra will be here about next Tuesday."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and to-day is Wednesday."

"Yes."

"Tell her that I was here when her letter arrived."

"I will."

"And started at once to meet my brother."

"Yes."

"Tell her to let you quietly give out that she will start the next Tuesday for Ranchero's Rest, and that Night Hawk and myself are to be her guides, accompanied by our negro—Scraps, and Red Wolf the Comanche."

"I understand."

"Let this reach the ears of that man Kent, and also Tiger Tom."

"Broncho Bill, you are playing a deep game, and I'm betting big money on you to win."

"I am trusting you, Hall, because I know that I can do so."

"Every time, Bill."

"Tell the lady that Night Hawk and I have a little game to play that will prevent our coming before next Monday night week, and we will be then ready to start."

"Also be sure and do not permit her, under any circumstances, to go with others, in her anxiety to visit the Ranchero's Rest, and do not allow her, or her maid, to go away from the hotel without your watching them."

"There are good men that you know in this town, so put them as secret guards upon her; but trust no man who drinks, for this must all be kept a secret until the proper time."

"Broncho Bill, I'll do just as you tell me."

"And do not have much to say to Kent, for honestly, landlord, he's a black sheep."

"I half suspected it when you asked for this room, Broncho."

"He will leave the hotel, mark my word, and go elsewhere in town, as soon as you let it be known that you expect Mademoiselle Cleopatra."

"I see, and I tell you, Broncho, you are a born detective," said Landlord Hall, with enthusiasm.

"Now there is another thing."

"Yes."

"You know a good man, one who wears buckskin and whom you can trust?"

"Yes; what's the matter with Buckskin Sam?"

"The very man, and he does not look unlike me either."

"Where is he?"

"Over at the plaza, or was an hour ago."

"I wish you would go and see him, and tell him to go out on the emigrant trail, where it rounds the old abode but and there wait for me."

"I will be there within the hour."

"Shall he go mounted and ready for a trail, Broncho?"

"Buckskin Sam is too good a prairieman, landlord, to go any other way."

"I'll tell him."

"I may be wrong, but I think you may hear some news in the morning."

"Now see Sam, please, and let me know what he says."

"When you come back I'll be off, and please be in the saloon, for I'll come in there to say good-by to you."

"I understand."

So saying Landlord Hall departed from the room, and in twenty minutes had returned.

"It's all right, Broncho, and Sam has gone."

"Thank you."

"But is Tiger Tom down-stairs?"

"Yes, I saw him in the saloon playing cards."

"Good! now go and take a seat him until I come, and in the mean time order my horse."

The landlord did as directed, and when ready to start Broncho Bill went down-stairs and then entered the saloon, where a large crowd had gathered.

CHAPTER XX.

TRAILING AND TRAILED.

WHEN Broncho Bill entered the saloon, all eyes turned upon him, and Tiger Tom, who had returned and was playing cards, moved uneasily in his seat.

He had not however ventured back alone, for in the crowd were half a dozen of his companions, scarcely less evil than himself.

When he saw Broncho Bill enter the saloon, it is probable, backed as he was, that he would have sought a quarrel with him, feeling safe with his pards about him, or rather safe enough to take the chances; but the words of the young scout caused him to remain silent, while a sinister look passed over his face.

"Good-night, landlord, for I'm off on the trail home," called out Broncho Bill, in a voice that he meant Tiger Tom to hear.

It was this that caused the desperado to hesitate in his intention.

"What! Not going to remain until morning?" asked Landlord Hall.

"No, for I'm anxious to be off, and I can reach the mesquite motte by midnight, and will camp there until daylight."

"Good-night, pards."

So saying, Broncho Bill politely doffed his sombrero, shook hands with Landlord Hall, whose invitation to have a parting drink he declined—for neither he or Night Hawk ever touch liquor—and left the saloon.

A moment after Tiger Tom, who was seated by an open window, saw him ride by at a canter.

Tiger Tom, a moment after, threw down his cards and said:

"Pards, I'm sleepy, so I says quits."

"Come, let's drink, and then I goes ter roost."

Those about him accepted the invitation, and a moment after he walked off, accompanied by one of his intimates.

Once they had left the hotel they walked rapidly to the quarters of Tiger Tom, and a few moments after three more of his pals joined him, for they had recognized his signal for them to join him there.

"Pards, who wants jist two hundred and fifty dollars?" he asked.

In chorus came the response:

"I does!"

"It's ter kill."

No one seemed to be suprised at this, and Tiger Tom continued:

"I wants three of yer ter mount yer horses, and go with yer guns ready."

"Yer heard Broncho Bill say as how he were ter camp in ther mesquite motte?"

A nod of assent followed the question.

"Waal, strike out on his trail, git him in sight and keep him thar, but don't let him see yer."

"When he camps he'll likely build a fire; but you keep on watch, creep up and let him have it; do you hear?"

All nodded.

"Now, I has two hundred and fifty dollars fer yer when ther work is did, and yer gits his horse, weepens and outfit, not ter speak o' his money, and he generally goes as well loaded with gold as he do with lead."

"What does yer say?"

"You won't go?" asked one.

"I hain't no durned fool, ef I does look it, to have a accident happen to him arter my quarrel with him to-day, and I be found away from town."

"Thet's so."

"Then if it were suspected I did ther work, thar is his brother, Night Hawk, a-livin', and yer all knows him."

They seemed to.

Then one said:

"Make it a hundred apiece, and I'm one."

"And me."

"Count me Number Three."

"It's a bargain; now git yer hosses and light out, but don't come back ter town by ther trail yer goes."

Ten minutes after the three cut-throats were upon the trail of Broncho Bill.

They rode rapidly for awhile, and feeling that they were coming close upon him, they slackened their pace.

As they reached the top of a prairie rise, they saw before them in the darkness the shadowy outline of a horseman.

"It's him," said one.

They just kept that horseman in view, and at a distance at which he would not be visible to them, unless they held their gaze upon him constantly, while he, glancing back, would be unable to see them.

The swish of his horse's feet through the grass they knew would prevent his hearing the sound made by their animals.

Thus they followed him, until a clump of mesquites arose in view ahead.

Toward these the horseman went, and his trailers halted.

It was the mesquite where Broncho Bill had said that he intended to camp.

After a short delay, the trailers saw a light flash in the timber.

"He's built a fire," whispered one.

"He's our game," another remarked.

"It's our money," was the third response.

In a short while a dim glimmer was seen in the motte, and soon after the watchers saw it die away.

"He's blanketed, pards."

"Yas; now move."

"Come."

So they went toward the timber, leaving their horses staked out on the prairie.

At first they walked forward boldly, for they were quite a distance off; but then, as they drew near, they stooped low, and next began to crawl.

As they gained a point almost in the edge of the timber, they saw that the light from a small fire casting flickering flashes through the timber.

Nearer and nearer they crept, until they beheld a dark form lying not far from the fire.

"Thar he is."

"Sure."

"We has got him."

"Is yer ready?"

"Yes."

"I is."

"You, Nick, aim at his head."

"Yas."

"Rube, take him in ther body."

"I will."

"And I'll send lead inter ther neighborhood o' his heart, nigh as I kin guess."

The three rifles were thrust forward, and then came the whispered words:

"Are yer ready?"

"Yas."

"I are."

"Fire!"

The three rifles flashed together almost; but almost immediately after came a flash from another part of the timber, and another from out upon the prairie.

With the reports following those two flashes, a couple of the murderous trio went down in their tracks, while loud rung the command from on the prairie, a few paces behind the group:

"Hands up, or you are a dead man?"

The man thus addressed was stunned with fright.

His two comrades lay at his feet still as death.

But he had sense enough to raise his hands.

A moment more a man sprung to his side and dragged him toward the timber, in which the fire now sprung up from fresh fuel thrown upon it by another.

"Broncho Bill!" gasped the prisoner, as he recognized his captor.

"At your service, Nick Halstead, and permit me to tell you that there is another one you know, Buckskin Sam," and Broncho Bill pointed to a wiry young man, with long black hair and piercing eyes, who stood by the fire.

"And that is?"

The man pointed at the form lying by the fire, into which the three rifle bullets had been sent.

"Oh, that is grass, which Buckskin Sam wrapped up in his blanket for a target for you."

Buckskin Sam laughed, and the prisoner said in a husky voice:

"My pards is dead."

"Oh yes, and you ought to be too, for a more cowardly assassin I never met; but I'll let you off as a warning to others, and Buckskin Sam will escort you back to town."

"Oh Lord! they'll hang me."

"No, for Sam will not let them do that, bad as you are."

"You've got a hand full o' trumps, Broncho Bill."

"I have won my game, for I thought that I might be dogged, and so Sam came on for you to trail, while I trailed you, and you know the result."

"Now let us get your dead pards mounted for you to take back to town with you."

Leaving Buckskin Sam to guard the prisoner, Broncho Bill went off upon the plain and soon returned with the horses.

The dead bodies were placed upon their respective horses and tied there after which the prisoner was secured in his saddle, and Broncho Bill then turned to the young Texan who had helped him carry out his plot.

"Sam, I won't forget you, old fellow, and you know I appreciate your kindness in this matter to-night."

"Don't let them hang Nick Halstead, for if I forgive him, the boys should; but let them know how it happened."

"Good-by until we meet again."

"Good-by, Broncho Bill, and call on me when you need me," responded Buckskin Sam, and he rode away, the prisoner riding by his side, and the horses carrying the dead riders trotting along behind.

After seeing them depart, Broncho Bill mounted his own horse and rode away on the trail that would lead him to the old ruined Mission.

CHAPTER XXI.

NIGHT HAWK'S MISSION.

WHILE Broncho Bill was on his way to the town, to enter upon his work there as a detective in Buckskin, it will be recalled by the reader that his gallant brother Night Hawk, had also left the canyon on the banks of the Rio Grande to return to the old Mission, where his camp was.

He had a dangerous trail to follow, and yet his skill as a plainsman enabled him to keep clear of dangers.

He was more cautious than was his wont, not to run upon any band of red-skins, well knowing how much depended upon him for the future.

Without being seen by any Indians, though twice he saw several bands of them himself, he reached the old Mission and arrived just after sunset.

He had been spied by Scraps, who was keeping watch in the "nest," and the negro was almost broken-hearted when he beheld Night Hawk alone, and that Broncho Bill was not with him.

He hastily made the fact known to Red Wolf, and the strange dweller of the ruin heard his words.

She seemed to be deeply moved at the report, and said:

"I sincerely hope nothing has happened to the brave senor."

Red Wolf also showed feeling, and when Scraps came down from the tree tears were in his honest eyes.

As the scout rode into the camp, the negro called out:

"Ah, Mars' George, am Mars' Will dead?"

"Dead?"

"No, indeed, he has gone to town on business."

Scraps at once began to cut a pigeon-wing, while Red Wolf uttered almost a war-cry of joy.

From the lips of the beautiful woman there came a fervent:

"Thank God!"

Night Hawk was touched by this display of feeling at the thought that his brother was dead, and he said quickly:

"No, no, Will is all right, only we parted company at the Rio Grande, as there was separate work for us to do."

"I will soon join him again, and in the meantime, Wolf, I want you to go to the fort with a letter to Major Loring."

"Red Wolf ready," was the prompt reply.

"Don't go until you have had your supper, which Scraps will doubtless give us now, as he

knows Will is all right," and Night Hawk smiled, while the negro replied:

"I c'u'dn't cook no supper, when I thoughted Mars' Will were dead."

"You have a great big heart, Scraps, and I shall tell Will how much you all care for him."

Scraps at once set to work to cook supper, the fire being hidden from sight in a small cabin built for it, so that no light would be seen from it, by any one off on the prairie, and so cautious were all that they never allowed a smoke to be seen by day, doing all the cooking at night.

After supper, which the woman joined them in, as she had done at the request of the Buckskin Brothers, from their coming to the ruin, Red Wolf mounted his horse, and with the letter which Night Hawk had written to General Loring, set off for the fort.

After the departure of the Comanche, Scraps took his pipe and stretched himself out on his blanket for a smoke, while Night Hawk said:

"May I have a short talk with you, senora?"

"Certainly, senor."

"Be seated, please."

He sat down upon the rustic bench, which Scraps had manufactured, and Night Hawk took a seat near her.

After a moment of silence he said:

"Senora, I wish you to believe that what I say to you is for your good, and I hope you will be guided by my advice."

"If it is to leave this place, senor, I never can, unless it is to go into hiding about here," she said earnestly.

"Wait and hear what I have to say, and trust me wholly, for I ask you to give me your confidence."

She looked up at him in a strange way, and said nothing.

Then he asked:

"Do you know San Cruz?"

"What! the chief of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande?"

"Yes."

"I know him as a cruel, red-handed outlaw, senor."

"No more?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"You never met him?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Are you not the Senora Celina Delporte?"

A cry broke from her lips at the question, and she became livid, as the firelight plainly showed.

"Will you not answer me?"

"Why torture me, for I feel that you know me?" she groaned.

"Senora, I do not mean to torture you; but I am now sure that my suspicion was right and that you are the Senora Celina Delporte."

"I dare not deny it; but tell me how you know me?" and she wrung her hands nervously.

"I overheard a conversation about you."

"Ah! do others know who I am, and where I am?"

"No, only my brother."

"Heaven be praised! but you will not betray me?"

"Oh no."

"And who was talking of me?"

"San Cruz."

"The outlaw chief?"

"Yes."

"And why?"

"He set a bound to track you down."

She looked frightened, and Night Hawk hastened to say:

"Have no fear, for he shall not harm you."

"But my brother and myself were lying in hiding and saw San Cruz meet a cowboy spy of his, while all that they said reached our ears."

"They spoke of other things, and then San Cruz asked the spy to hunt you down for him, and that he would pay him well."

"And why should the outlaw chief wish to hunt me down—ha! I know! he acts for another."

"No, he acts for himself."

"But why?"

"You are mistaken in thinking you do not know him, for he is your worst foe."

"Senor Night Hawk, I have one foe who is so bitter toward me, that he wishes me dead."

"It is San Cruz."

"You are mistaken, senor."

"You are the widow of a rich ranchero, who left you his fortune, cutting off his wild son without a peso."

"That son pretended to leave Mexico for the United States, but instead he joined a band of outlaws, allowed his hair and beard to grow long, and he is now their chief."

"What his name is, I know not; but he is now known as Captain San Cruz, the Chief of the Cowboy Pirates!"

She sprang to her feet with a cry, and said excitedly:

"Ramon Delporte the outlaw chief?"

"Yes, if such was the name of the son of the old ranchero whom you married?"

"It was, and he has been cruel, oh, so cruel to me."

"I know all, and how he sent you to a mad-house, and you escaped."

"Yes, senor, with the aid of a faithful peon servant that was with my parents and knew me as a child."

"His wife was my nurse, and they aided me to escape and came here with me."

"My poor old nurse died here a year ago, but her devoted husband brings me supplies twice a year, and I hide here to keep Ramon Delporte from sending me back to a mad-house."

"You need have no fear of him, senora."

"I heard his story, as did my brother, and within a short while he will be our prisoner, and quick justice will be visited upon him, for I have sent Red Wolf to the fort to ask Major Loring to give me a squad of soldiers to help us; but are you ill, senora?" and Night Hawk stepped toward the woman, who had become deadly pale.

"Did you say Major Loring, senor?"

"Yes."

"Willis Loring? Is that his name?"

"It is, senora."

She drooped her head and remained silent, and a moment after arose and walked quickly away with a short:

"I thank you, senor, good-night."

CHAPTER XXII.

NIGHT HAWK'S GOOD WORK.

WHEN the Senora Delporte, the mysterious dweller in the old Mexican Mission, showed the excitement she did when he had mentioned the name of Major Loring, Night Hawk did not at first know what to make of it.

Then it came back to his recollection that in telling his story to Tiger Tom, the outlaw chief San Cruz, had spoken of the young Mexican girl having loved an American officer, before she married his father, which she had been forced to do by her parents.

"Can it be that Major Loring was that American officer?" resumed Night Hawk.

"Glad indeed will I be if I can bring them again together, for she is a widow now, and Major Loring has never married, and it was not her fault that she had to break with him."

With this hope in his heart, of uniting two lives long separated, Night Hawk sought his blankets, and tired after his long ride was soon fast asleep.

When the senora joined him at breakfast the following morning, he did not speak to her of what he heard the outlaw chief say about her American lover, but after she had finished her breakfast she said:

"Senor Night Hawk, I feel that I owe it to you to tell you of the story of my life, and I will do so."

Then she told all as he already knew it, but never once referred to Major Loring, though she spoke of having been engaged to one whom she dearly loved, when her parents forced her to marry the old Mexican ranchero.

The scout knew well who this was, yet did not say so, and after her confession a load seemed to have been taken from off the heart of the unfortunate woman, and she said:

"Now, senor, with you and your noble brother my friends, I will have no fear, and my life may yet know some contentment, and it may be happiness."

"I am determined that it shall, Senora Delporte," said Night Hawk earnestly.

The next day when up in the "nest" Night Hawk sighted a party of horsemen far off across the plains.

They were coming toward the Mission, and turning his glass upon them, he said:

"It is Red Wolf and the soldiers—ah! I do believe that Major Loring himself is there; but I will soon be able to tell."

After a short while longer, he said:

"It is Major Loring, and I will meet him."

"The soldiers are coming, senor, I heard you say to Scraps?"

"Yes, senors," said Night Hawk, as the fair Mexican met him when he came down from the nest.

"I will keep in hiding, for I care not to be seen, and I beg you not to let me be intruded upon."

"You shall not be, senora," was the reply,

and mounting his horse, Night Hawk rode away to meet the coming soldiers.

They were a mile from the Missouri, when he crossed the ford, but he rode at a gallop and as he approached they gave him a cheer, while the major grasped his hand and said:

"Powell, I came myself, for I was anxious to solve the mystery of that white-robed form I saw here one night a year ago, and of which I told you."

"I asked your Comanche if he had seen any ghosts in the old ruin, and he said simply:

"Chief Night Hawk talk, Comanche keep still."

Night Hawk laughed, and turning to the Indian, said:

"Wolf, you have made a big ride, for I did not expect you so soon."

"You are a great chief."

The Indian seemed pleased at this praise, and turning to the commandant, as they rode on together, Night Hawk remarked:

"Major, I have seen your ghost."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

"And what is it?"

"A woman."

"What?"

"It is true, sir."

"No sham?"

"No, sir."

"Who is she?"

"One of the sweetest faced ladies I ever saw, sir."

"A lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"In Heaven's name what is she doing there?"

"She has dwelt there for over two years."

"Not alone?"

"A part of the time, sir."

"Night Hawk you deeply interest me."

"We saw her when we approached the place by moonlight, and Scraps took to his heels, so real was the seeming ghost."

"But my brother Will pursued her and caught her with his lariat."

"Then we learned that she had been a dweller in the old ruin for over three years, and Will and myself went to the Rio Grande, and as I wrote you, we saw Captain San Cruz and beheld him meet a spy, a borderman whom we know."

"We heard all that was said, and though we could have killed or captured them, we left them for future reference."

"A bird in the hand, Powell, you know—"

"Not in this case, major, does that apply, for we will gain more by letting them go."

"Will went after the spy to the town, and I came here, while San Cruz recrossed the river."

"He put his spy to work to track down a woman, and the story he told of her was a sad one."

"She was a Mexican maiden, and engaged to an American officer, but her parents, who were not rich, forced her to marry an old ranchero of vast wealth, who had a wild son, then grown."

"The ranchero was killed, I feel sure, by his son, from what San Cruz, who was that son, said, and the wealth went to the young wife."

"But the son, who had also loved his beautiful step-mother, failing to force her into a marriage with him as his father's widow, put her in an insane asylum."

"The brute!"

"Yes, major, brute he is; but the lady escaped and crossed into Texas, and it was to hunt her down that San Cruz offered a small fortune to his spy, Tiger Tom; for, by her death, he would be able to claim his father's fortune."

"I see, and San Cruz is the son?"

"Yes, sir, and the ghost of the old Mission is the poor woman whose life he seeks."

"This is a remarkable story, Powell, and the unfortunate woman has my deepest sympathy."

"I felt that she would have, Major Loring, but you will feel for her still deeper sympathy when you know that her maiden name, before she became Senora Delporte, was *Celina Velasquez*."

"Celina Velasquez! Great God!" and the major turned livid.

"Yes, major; and if you will wander over yonder to the chapel you will find her, for I happen to know that you are the American officer to whom, as Senorita Velasquez, she was engaged, and whom she has never ceased to love."

"God bless you, Powell!" and the major's voice quivered as he spoke, while dismounting, he threw his bridle-rein to his orderly and walked toward the chapel which Night Hawk had pointed out as the spot where he would find the beautiful Mexican whom he had so dearly loved in past years, and had never forgotten, though he had believed her false to him.

That night there was quite a jolly party around the camp-fires in the timber, for when Major Willis Loring had again joined his troopers, he was accompanied by Senora Delporte, and the officer, in a few simple words, told the story of her past, and how a cruel fate had divided their paths in life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TROOPERS ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN Major Loring left the fort, in answer to the letter of Night Hawk, which had requested him to send him a dozen picked cavalymen, he had brought with him a score of the best soldiers in his command.

He had also picked the horses as well as the men, and with Red Wolf to guide them to the old Mission, he felt no anxiety, knowing that they would find Night Hawk there awaiting them.

The arrival of the major and his men, the reader has seen, as well as what followed, in the reuniting, by the gallant Night Hawk, of two loving hearts that had been long parted, the soldier feeling that the beautiful Mexican girl, whom he had so fondly loved, had been false to him, for never had he received a word of explanation of her having married the old rancho, a man of three-score years.

She had written him telling him all; but her father had never allowed the letter to go, and the gallant American soldier naturally believed that she had been dazzled by the riches of the old rancho, and had sold herself for gold.

The day after the arrival of the major and his picked cavalymen, a horseman was seen approaching, leading another animal bearing a pack.

All watched his approach, and as he drew nearer, Celina Delporte said:

"Ah! it is my faithful Perez, the peon who has brought me food here at the risk of his life."

Perez, the peon, was considerably alarmed at first, when he rode into the midst of a body of soldiers, but Senora Delporte quickly allayed his fears, and Major Loring, whom the peon had before seen, welcomed him pleasantly with this remark:

"I have found your young mistress, Perez, and I do not intend to lose her again, and you shall remain with us, for the senora has told me how faithful you have been to her in her sorrows."

"Ah, senor, I have but done my duty; but I am happy now, for the senora is happy," responded the old peon.

The next day another horseman came in sight, and a cheer broke from the troopers when it was reported to be Broncho Bill.

"Now, major, we can start to-night for the Rio Grande," said Night Hawk.

"That means that Captain San Cruz will not trouble Senora Delporte much longer," the major replied.

"Yes, sir; but here is Will."

Broncho Bill now rode up and raised his sombrero at the greeting that he received.

But he seemed surprised to see the soldiers there, and especially when he gazed upon Senora Delporte, whose face no longer wore the sad look which it had when he departed.

"Well, George, what's up?" he asked, in a surprised way.

Walking apart with Broncho Bill, and asking the major to join them, Night Hawk quickly made known to his brother all that had occurred at the old Mission.

"Major Loring, accept my sincere congratulations, sir," said Broncho Bill earnestly.

"All happiness I possess, Will, I owe to your brother and yourself, and I assure you my life from my coming here has had a deep shadow raised from it."

"But what of your trip to town?"

"It is soon told, for I reached there without accident, and found this letter awaiting me for George and myself," and Broncho Bill read the first letter written to them by the beautiful actress.

"That was our idea after she told us of her life, that her husband was at the bottom of that scheme to kidnap her, and Tiger Tom assured us of it by what he said to San Cruz," Night Hawk remarked.

"Well, I found the husband right in the hotel when I got there."

"He had the best room in Landlord Hall's home, and this photograph which the mademoiselle sent me, told me very quickly that Mr. Kent was the man who was seeking to have his wife killed, for some reason known to himself alone."

"I took Landlord Hall partly into my con-

fidence, changed my room to the one that adjoined Kent's, and I played eavesdropper, not by accident, as you did in New York, Will, but on purpose, for Tiger Tom was the visitor to my next-door neighbor."

"All that was said I heard, and it was a pleasant little plot to get rid of Mademoiselle Cleopatra."

"Her husband had dogged her, after leaving her, until he learned that she was to return, and then he came back to lay his plans."

"Tiger Tom and Captain San Cruz were just the right villains he needed to help him, and the plan was well arranged to attack the lady and her escort, by pretended Indians, kill her, and all with her, and bring her body back, so that there would be no doubt as to her death."

"This makes me think the man had something to gain by her death."

"I also heard Tiger Tom's opinion of us, Will, and, as you were not with me, he said that he meant to call in my chips."

"But, overhearing his little game, I was forearmed, and the next night I surprised him."

"You did not kill him, Will?" quickly said George Powell.

"Oh, no, merely made him eat his words, for I would not cheat justice from hanging him," was the cool rejoinder.

"You are right," said Night Hawk.

Then Broncho Bill continued:

"Having discovered all that was necessary for the carrying out of our plan, George, I was preparing to depart when in came Landlord Hall, with another letter for us."

"From the mademoiselle of course?"

"Yes, and here it is. I will read it."

He did so, and after some comments upon it from both the major and Night Hawk, Broncho Bill continued:

"This seemed to play right into our hands, and so I told Landlord Hall to keep the lady at the hotel until our arrival, and to give out before she came that she would arrive, for I knew that this would make Kent skip for other quarters."

"Then Landlord Hall was to tell how the lady was to start on a certain day, Tuesday week, for the Rancho's Rest, under our guidance, George, and with Scraps and Wolf to go with us."

"I knew that Tiger Tom would take this all to the King Bee, the chief of the Rio Grande Pirates, and he would have his plans laid to kill the outfit, getting his golden reward and wiping us out too."

"That night I left, but before going I could not refrain from giving Tiger Tom a chance to assassinate me, so I told Landlord Hall in a loud tone where I would camp, and got him to ask that splendid fellow Buckskin Sam to help him out."

"He did so, and while they went trailing along after Buckskin Sam, I trailed them, saw them shoot Sam's blanket full of holes, and chipping in ourselves, we got rid of two of the three, who should thank us for saving them from the gallows, and captured the third."

"Buckskin Sam then started back to town with two dead riders and a live one, and I came in here, hoping to catch you, George, before you had started for the rendezvous on the Rio Grande, and I am lucky in having done so."

"Yes, for we would have started within the hour, had we not seen you coming."

"Well, George, what is your plan?"

"To go to the Rio Grande, watch our chance, capture San Cruz, and then in some way get his men across to this shore, and have the major pounce upon them with his soldiers."

"A good plan, and then there are Tiger Tom and the man Kent to look after, with a few other desperadoes of like kind that I have spotted."

"Well, we will start at once, if you say so," said the major, and leaving Perez, the peon with Celina Delporte, the soldiers started upon the hunt for the Cowboy Pirates, who had so long been a curse upon the Rio Grande frontier.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

As Night Hawk had planned, San Cruz, the chief of the Cowboy Pirates of the Rio Grande, was captured at the rendezvous in the canyon near the river, where he was in the habit of hunting his spy, Tiger Tom, and justice was satisfied when the daring and red-handed outlaw was swung up to a tree and thus expiated his many crimes.

But it was not possible to get the band of outlaws across the river, and Major Loring dared

not go over and attack them upon Mexican soil, and so had to be content with the hanging of their chief and return to the fort.

But he did not fail to return by the old Mission and carry with him the lovely exile, who soon after was made his wife, the chaplain of the fort performing the ceremony and Night Hawk and Broncho Bill acting as "best men."

Tiger Tom got wind of trouble ahead in some way, and, informing Kent, they escaped to the Mexican side of the river, and it was said that the latter became chief of the Cowboy Pirates in the place of the hanged San Cruz.

The Buckskin Brothers were on hand, however, to escort the beautiful actress to Rancho's Rest, where she visited the grave of her dead lover and then returned to civilization to continue her triumphs before the footlights, though the glare of the theater could never efface from her memory the scenes of her adventures upon the Texan prairies when she owed her life to George and Will Powell, the Buckskin Detectives.

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